

*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*

# RUE MORCUE

18<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY  
HALLOWEEN  
ISSUE

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# TALES OF HALLOWEEN

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WILL DECIDE WHO SURVIVES  
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## 38 THE MONSTER MAKES THE MAN

Twenty-five years after directing his last and biggest budget film, Roger Corman reflects on *Frankenstein Unbound* and a career in creature features.

**PLUS!** Abbott and Costello face off against Frankenstein and other classic monsters in a new DVD set.

by MICHAEL DOYLE and PAUL CORUPE

## 16 TAKE ME TO THE OTHER SIDE

(Link) Take it all the place and join our experts as we investigate 125 years of the most popular method of talking to the dead: the Ouija board.

**PLUS!** Talking board historians and collector (Shirley) Hodge helps us trace the strange history of the planchette, and a guide to the Ouija board in cinema.

by APRIL BRIDGES and PERRY THOMAS

## 28 50 ESSENTIAL HORROR ALBUMS

Rue Morgan picks the deadly discs that created, evolved or defined genre music through the decades.

by AMEN VON LIPSTON, DAVID ALEXANDER, PAUL CORUPE, JEREMY MORRIS, AARON MOORE, LESS LEE MOORE, GEORGE PACHICO, JON STEPPENS and GLENN TILSON

## 46 FANTASIA 2015

Once again, we heed the call to Montreal's famous genre film festival to gorge on a bacchanal buffet of horror movie madness, by PAUL CORUPE, BILLYE GIMMING, MAUD GIBBARD-BELLMARE, ANNY MAULD, SEAN PLUMMER and TAL ZICHMAN.

## 52 DEL TORO'S DARK HOUSE

Gillermo del Toro takes us inside the world of *Chacona Peak*, explaining that his gaffs romance is not another ghost movie—or even a hearted house film at all.

by DAVID ALEXANDER

## 56 HIGHWAYS TO HELL

Nearly every comic book publisher has at least one zombie apocalypse title, and they owe it all to the long-running gore saga *Deadworld*.

by JAMES SCHMITZ and DAVID ALEXANDER

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Wildmen and vampires return to New Orleans in Ryo Aiken's online serial-killer-movie sequel novel *The Corpse City*. by MONICA S. KUBLER

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# POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



**ANOTHER MONTH** another new issue of Rue Morgue (#158). Wow. What a stunning cover! Just beautiful! @RueMorgue, @Vetrant!

@PHILALEASHER, VIA TWITTER

**HILL-O-FUE MORRIS**, I have been a horror kid all my life and until recently I only picked up the occasional issue of Rue Morgue (Devilbox, The Gramps, etc.) but now, thanks to HorrorBlack, I am hooked and realize what I've been missing. I really like the coverage of all things horror and have read the issues I've gotten cover to cover and am looking into back issues. I am really into horror toys, it all started with the 15" Kenner Alien figure when I was five or six years old. I have amassed a huge collection of horror stuff over the years and have a museum's worth of horror toys. Over the past couple years I have started a new hobby due to the fact that sometimes I read something for the shelf that no one is making. I work mostly in the 12" figure format, I paint, sculpt and costume a lot of the figures. Some of the clothing and unpaired heads I find online but the Twisted the Clown is 98 percent mine. Check out my YouTube Channel, Morningstar Inc., for videos of some of my horror creations. Keep the magazines coming and I'll keep reading it. You guys rock!

DEVILBOX, VIA EMAIL



**LOVE ME THOSE** Nightmare Glove featured in Gary Peikin's Fright Gallery column in the latest issue. I always thought these store bought Freddy gloves looked cheap and unconvincing so I'm pretty happy to see there are options for serious collectors. Keep my horror heart beating, guys!

BERNARD SHARP, VIA FACEBOOK

**DEAREST RUE MORRIS** magazine, thank you for helping to keep one's bloody, inner child alive! Killer

Broke on the movie Rue Morgue #158  
THE RICHARD CARDINAL, VIA FACEBOOK

**I KNOW OF** Rue Morgue magazine for awhile but only bought an issue or two. I then started getting them in the Horror Black and it hooked me. You have an excellent magazine and I am looking forward to my subscription. I dropped Horror Black but couldn't go without your magazine.

MIAMI SMITH, VIA EMAIL

**IT HAS BEEN** over nine years since I first opened the pages of your magazine (starting with #MMS4), and since then I have read every issue religiously (minus four issues) I've seen ups and downs in my life and all the while I have had Rue Morgue. What I loved and still love about Rue Morgue is that you discuss the genre in a way that it is a reflection of society/culture, which I completely embrace. After nine years, I still get excited every month for your magazine. The horror genre isn't a costume I wear once a year at Halloween, it's a way of life. Rue Morgue has been and will be a big part of my life. Thank you!

NICHOLAS SANCHEZ, VIA EMAIL

**I GOT A CHUCKLE** when I read your article concerning Joe Dante's *Burying the Ex* (#MMS5). Especially the part where "Evilyn travels out of the grave." Does anybody remember the Italian horror flick *The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave*? (Which itself could use a Blu-ray treatment.)

ALAN LEVINE - EWING, NEW JERSEY

**PICKED UP MY** copy of @RueMorgue's *Horrorweek North*. It's signed by author James Bunnell, too! I can't wait to read it.

@MYFONEDRAGONHORN, VIA TWITTER

**WE'VE BACK HOME** now, and I just wanted to thank Andrea Subotsek for showing my wife and I around the Rue Morgue Manor. Between that visit and the CineMacros screening the night before, Rue Morgue was responsible for a couple big highlights of our trip to Toronto. Thanks again!

SCOTT COLE, PHILADELPHIA

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## EXPIRING MINDS

ON RUE MORRIS' FACEBOOK PAGE



What's your favorite Wes Craven movie moment?

That trailer scene from *The Hills Have Eyes*.

DAVID KIRKING

The *Saw* and the *Widowmaker* being buried alive with a large terracotta dome.

ALEX ELIASO

*Shocker*, when Francis Pinter bites the guard's lip, then the other guard's fingers off, and says "Finger Licking Good." I love that.

LAG LESSARD

Kag fighting off the chainsaw-wielding dad in *Last House on the Left*.

JASON LOHE

STAN's redgum scene in *The People's Choice* film *Stone*.

DAVID ANDERSON

Johnny Bopp being eaten by a bat and spit out in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

CAMERON MITTS

Wes' cameo in *Dead Nightmare*. I really gave you a glimpse of the soft-spoken, friendly, relaxing, storytelling genius that he was.

DENNIS GIER



# Treadlines

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS — HORROR HAPPENINGS

## TORONTO ZOMBIE WALK SUCCEUMBS TO LACK OF MUNICIPAL SUPPORT

It seems appropriate that the Toronto Zombie Walk, which was cancelled this year due to insufficient funding, should rise from the dead, however briefly.

Organizers held a "funeral" for the much-loved annual event at independent Toronto repertory cinema The Royal this past August. Over 200 "resurrectors" showed up, many of them dressed as the undead. Those who left a donation in a casket set up on The Royal's stage were given free tickets to the Canadian National Exhibition. Zombies then shuffled en masse to the annual carnival set up at Toronto's waterfront.

Founding director Theo Munster, who started the walk back in 2003, saw it grow from just seven participants in its first year to over 15,000 in 2014. Organizers never charged an entrance fee, and it became an annual tradition for horror lovers and regular families alike.

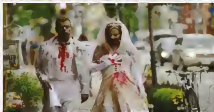
"I definitely think that people embraced the Toronto Zombie Walk because of its inclusivity," explains Munster, "as well as the fact that it gives such a large platform for creativity, and it's just fun!"

But with great success came great cost. As the event grew, organizers had to pay for road closures, insurance, city permits and bands providing live entertainment. Sponsorship offset some of the costs, as did provincial funding, but this year's loss of a \$10,000 Celebrate Ontario tourism grant and an unsuccessful crowdfunding campaign proved too devastating for an event run by volunteers. News of the Toronto Zombie Walk's cancellation came this past May.

"It hurts my guts, morally," says Munster. "I feel very bad for all the children and families who see this event as a yearly tradition. I'm very sad we couldn't make it work."

The event's funeral was announced via social media in August. Its original location was Trinity Bellwoods, a large park in downtown Toronto, but when local media picked up on the story, so too did local government. Organizers were told they would have to pay a \$3000 fine if they held their event at Trinity Bellwoods (is Torontozomb-walk?).

"I don't think the city is anti-zombie," Munster says. "But I think they believe when we put our names on something there will be thousands of attendees, which is usually untrue, unless it's the walk. Even if there were thousands of zombies



Wedding zombies attend the "funeral" for the Toronto Zombie Walk and (top) creator Theo Munster

raising the streets, the city would have nothing to worry about. There has never been an issue or negative incident at the zombie walk. The undead are the nicest people you will ever meet and are very well behaved."

As for the service itself, Munster says that the resurrectors "definitely put the fun in funeral."

"We got Hozanella - my '64 Pontiac horse - on the road for the occasion, and it carried a lovely black coffin from casketdirect.ca to The Royal Cinema. The Royal is beautiful, and it actually may have been better than Trinity Bellwoods Park in the long run."

Munster remains "completely devastated" by the cancellation but thinks the walk's legacy will

survive its death.

"I do think this is different for everyone who attends, but the TZW has left a strong community. It has brought a lot of people together and created bonds which will last longer than an after-lifetime. We also inspired a lot of people to become makeup artists, the walk being their first experience to show off their talents."

But is the Toronto Zombie Walk really dead? Munster is moving on to other projects ("that's all whippers in the cemetery right now"), but she refuses to categorically deny its eventual resurrection.

"Maybe I'm not saying no yet."

SEAN FLEMING

Photos by Alex Melillo



# INDIE HORROR SERIES 8 FILMS TO DIE FOR RETURNS

As the horror genre teaches us, things rise from the dead all the time, case in point: *After Dark Films' 8 Films To Die For*. Debuting in 2005, *Horrorfest: 8 Films To Die For* brought eight indie horror films to theatres across North America. The event ran through 2010 and featured among its various high-profile debuts Jim Mickle's critically acclaimed *Mulberry Street*, Pierce Pennington Jr.'s *From Within* and Anthony DiIorio's adaptation of *Dead*, one of the most acclaimed stories in *Oliver Barker's Books of Blood*.

After going on hiatus, the series has been resurrected in time for Halloween, thanks to a new deal that sees *After Dark Films* teaming up with Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, which will handle distribution. According to Stephanie Calkins, EHP, Creative Affairs & Acquisitions for *After Dark Films*, it's an ideal match.

"It allows us to reach a larger audience of horror fans," she explains. "Previously these films were released over one week in a limited amount of theatres and then released on DVD four months later. Over the years, many of our fans complained that they had to drive too far



That's when he came up with the idea to start a theatrical festival of sorts — a brand under which we could release eight films a year. Under the moniker *Horrorfest: 8 Films To Die For* we were able to acquire, market and distribute these films all together in theatres. It was something that hadn't been done before. It was labor intensive, and required theatres to adopt an entirely new way of doing things, but it was definitely a labor of love and so worth it."

The new batch of films to fall under the

*8 Films To Die For* banner are *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein), *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein), *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein), *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein), *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein), *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein), *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein), *Re-Kill* (David Finkelstein).

EVERY FAMILY HAS ITS DEMONS



remaining undisturbed five years after the zombie apocalypse, *Suspensor* (Jeffrey Scott Landis), a slasher film featuring a group of high school kids, *Mind Walkers* (Russell Friedenberg), centered around a group searching for a missing friend in the Everglades who are confronted with a Native American curse, and *Unhallowed* (Frank Beckler), known for his feature of the Ghostbusters fan film, a polar bear creature feature that releases their *Phobia* slurs: *My Blue and Sherry's* from.

Calkins explains, "These films were all chosen because we felt they best represented a certain spectrum of the horror genre — the creature feature, the zombie film, the '70s throwback, the teen-slasher pic, and there are a couple films that didn't fit any mold. They are creating new territory."

The *8 Films To Die For* series begins on October 16, with same day VOD availability. For theatre listings, visit [8films.todolater.com](http://8films.todolater.com)

ANDY BURNS



"Courtney Salomone first formed *After Dark Films* back in 2005," recalls Calkins. "After our release of *American Hunting*, Courtney and I were screening multiple independent horror films a week in order to decide what would be the next best film to represent the new brand. There were so many good films out there and we realized many of them would not have the opportunity to be released theatrically. We were a new distribution company and we couldn't acquire, market and distribute all of these films



16, with same day VOD availability. For theatre listings, visit [8films.todolater.com](http://8films.todolater.com)



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BRANDS 8 PM

# STOKERCON BRINGS THE BRAM STOKER AWARDS TO VEGAS

After years of presiding the annual Bram Stoker Awards for excellence in horror literature in conjunction with the World Horror Convention, the Horror Writers Association is striking out on its own once again, for the first time since the 2012 awards, this time in Las Vegas.

The convention (and awards banquet) takes place May 12 to 15, 2016, and while that may seem like a long way away, registration for the event's programming and classes is already underway. One of the key ways StokerCon seeks to distinguish itself from WHC and other literary events is through its Horror University stream of programming.

"The workshops program we're running this year takes things to the next level when it comes to what we can offer our guests via creative programming," says R.J. Cavender, co-chair of StokerCon 2016. "With fifteen workshops, a Writers Laboratory, eleven free presentations by authorities in their fields, we really want to emphasize learning, but in a fun environment

surrounded by talks at every level and stage of the game. We're bringing in some agents for pitch sessions, have seats on Big 5 publishers, and some of the biggest names in horror indie publishing will be on hand for coffee/lectures [informal readings over coffee], panels and parties. Lots of chances to learn from the pros, network and just get to know one another."

For readers who may not attend ones to expand their skill set, StokerCon also offers a robust guest list of genre M heavyweights, including R.L. Stine (Goosebumps), editors Ellen Datlow and Stephen Jones (who will be the event's toastmaster), Jack Ketchum (*The Girl Next Door*), Leslie S. Klinger (*The New Annotated H.P. Lovecraft*), Daniel Kraus (*680's Core*), Anne Searling (*As I Know Myself*), *Wolf* author Neil Gaiman and more. The event will also host an assortment of panels, readings, Q&As and "excursions out into the Vegas night."

As for those who attend conventions for the social functions, Cavender promises StokerCon



will not disappoint.

"I like to think we've got something to offer for anyone: writers, readers, artists, fans, filmmakers, publishers, editors, agents and pros. I feel like I'm going to the Hollywood red carpet, but I assure you, 'All are welcome! All are welcome!'"

For more information on StokerCon and to register for Horror University, visit [stokercon2016.horror.org](http://stokercon2016.horror.org).

MONICA KUEHLER

## ENTRAILS

Character actor Lawrence Evans, who played Leatherstock's Uncle Monty in the 2003 remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, along with its 2006 prequel *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*, died August 7, in Burbank, California. Evans was well known for appearances on *The Incredibles*, *Star Trek Deep Space Nine* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. He was 51 years old.



With three films released in just three years, the *WWS* franchise continues to churn out new stories. The latest is *Scream*, a spinoff adaptation of *Angel's Night*. David Bruckner's short film from the first entry in the series. *Scream* sees the return of Lily Harnish

Ferman), whose latest play is a group of groomsmen who unknowingly release the seductive, flesh-eating demon upon their bachelor party. The film, directed by Gregg Bishop from a script by Ben Collins and Luke Polrowski, will debut in 2016 on the Chiller network.

The *Silence of the Lambs* fans have the chance to live as a piece of movie history. The Fayette County home where James "Burlito Bill" Garris lived and did all of his skinning and sewing, was put on sale over the summer for \$300,000 USD. While potential buyers will be pleased to see the house contains the foyer and dining room that appeared on screen, fans are forewarned that there is no pit dungeon on the premises.

Josh Schwartz, creator of television series *The O.C.*, *Chuck* and *Gossip Girl*, has turned his talents towards darker fare with his new show, *Monsterverse*. Based on the 2014 novel of the same name by David Headline, the series will revolve around an M&A-like story called *DREX* that sells products that make customers' fantasies come to life, often in horrific

ways. Fox has greenlit the pilot to air sometime in 2016.

Following on the heels of his first comic book series, *Apex*, John Carpenter returns to the graphic novel world with *Tales For A Halloween* Volume 1, an anthology series set to debut this month. The 100-page release will feature the talents of not only Carpenter, but also Steve Meyers (*30 Days Off Night*), Tim Bradstreet (various *Olive Barker* titles), David Schow (*The Crow*), Derek Robertson (*The Boyz*) and more.

Connected ABC series *Hannibal* has yet to be picked up by another network or streaming service. In the meantime, stars Hugh Dancy (FBI profiler Will Graham) and Mads Mikkelsen (*Hanibal*) have lined up new work. Dancy will star in the Hulu original series *The Way alongside Aaron Paul* (*Breaking Bad*), while Mikkelsen has an unannounced role in the upcoming *Star Wars* standalone film *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, directed by Gareth Edwards (*Starline*) and currently scheduled for release in December 2016.

AMY DUNN

## MONSTRO BIZARRO

According to a recent post by ABC News, the cryptid known as the Blakelyville Lizard Man was captured on photo and video. The Lizard Man, an alleged reptilian humanoid creature, has been reported by eyewitnesses in the Blakelyville, South Carolina area, dating back to 1965. In this latest sighting, the eyewitness who submitted the photo claims she slipped out of a church sanctuary one Sunday morning "to see the Lizard Man running along the highway." The accompanying video was submitted anonymously by someone who claimed to have seen the creature in the woods the next day. The photo appears to show a creature or miniature model rather than a real creature, while the short video — shot conventionally from a right-place-at-the-right-time angle — only reveals a shortway figure.

LYLE BLAKELY

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HELLIONS





# CORONER'S REPORT ★

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

SHOT ON  
160

When a 91-year-old Canadian retiree recently confessed to killing a prostitute in Britain nearly 70 years ago, he shattered a long-held record. There has been no greater span of time between a crime and a confession in British criminal history than his.

Sasha Radner was originally cast in *Black Christmas* (1974) as Pity—the role that went to Andrew MacLennan—but had to abandon the film just before shooting began because she got hired to be on *Saturday Night Live*.

Jonny Lee Miller and Daniel Craig of *Singapore* had their engagement photos go viral this summer all for the part posed in an open coffin for the shoot. Both Lee and Craig work in the funeral industry and wanted to show that "death is part of life."

While tracking alleged occult activity in a forest in France, Rue Margue France's Fabrice Delgado discovered a human ear and a small heart of unknown origin at the base of a tree. Police are investigating.

In August, James A. Young Jr. was killed when he was struck by a roller coaster at Cedar Point in Ohio after he jumped its security fence in an attempt to retrieve items he lost while on the ride.

Last October, Los Angeles resident Alex Wells dressed up as cinematic killer Michael Myers to propose to his girlfriend Katherine Giesse, while she roleplayed the filming locations of John Carpenter's *Halloween*.

Earlier this year, 150 crocodiles, alligators and caimans, many fully grown, were removed from the home of a Toronto man. Owning such animals is illegal in the city.

While shooting *Phone Night*, Leslie Nielsen was known for breaking the other actors' concentration by playing with an electronic "fart machine."

38 companies bundle Best Foods with pay \$6 million in restitution after a 62-year-old worker was accidentally cooked alive in 2012 in a pressure cooker filled with six tons of kum. One quarter of the payout will go to the worker's family.

Mrs. Harper's dog from the final season of *American Horror Story* had to be written out of several episodes because the canine (played as Lurch) had scheduling conflicts with *Suburgatory*, the TV show he also appeared in.

When Philip II of Spain, who ruled from 1556 to 1598, was executed, his coffin was discovered to contain two skulls, but only one body.

Sorden Laroux's 1911 novel *The Phantom of the Opera* drew inspiration from George du Maurier's 1884 novel *Nobby*, about a songstress who turned about her vocal talents was legions by a disfiguring man.

If you suffer from a fear of ventriloquist dummies, stalkers, anatomic crackers or anything else that makes you feel like you're being watched, you suffer from *autism*.

## BODY HORROR

EDGAR ALLAN POE

ACTRESS: Debi Talwar (Instagram, @talwar)

4 The client provided the caution material which was essentially an iconic high-contrast photo of Poe. I had been making an impression with my understated style over the past couple of years and she asked that I add to it to create a unique image, so it was a perfect opportunity for me to get to try it, especially considering it's a film of Poe's work.

HAVE A GREAT NIGHT! SEE YOU WITH US AT 10:00 PM - 11:00 PM - 12:00 PM.

## THE MC MORGUE SICK TOP SIX PUTREFACTION PITS



1. PHENOMENA  
MAGGOT MARIANNE
2. THE DESCENT  
BLOOD 'N' BONE BATH
3. OPEN GRAVE  
DECOMPOSING BODY BED
4. THE LOVED ONES  
SUBTERRANEAN DATE DISPOSAL BOX
5. THE DEAD PIT  
A POCKET OF ZOMBIE PATIENTS
6. ARMY OF DARKNESS  
ARMY'S DEADITE DEATH TRAP

**FOREST** TORTURED TAGLINE

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY... YOU MIGHT NEVER GET OUT ALIVE! **FF**

**FINAL WORDS**

"JUST THE TIP, I PROMISE."

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EDGAR ALLAN POE'S

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# NEEDFUL THINGS

AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME AT [RUE-MORGUE.COM](http://RUE-MORGUE.COM)

## 1 BULJA BOARD HANDBAG \$35.00

Keep the dead in hand with this 100% leather handbag, modified after the classic mystical talking board. It's made with a poly-fabric surface so it won't bleed, crack or fade... but we can't say that for the spirits.

## 2 MEN'S "EYE NAIL GOWHEAD" ROCKER TEE \$25

Kids today know that Euphoric is where it's at. So don't be shy, but the Great God Pan with this sleeveless tee by Knoxville GGG, designed to bring two very bad things together: rock 'n' roll and the devil that spawned it! Available in S, M, L, XL, XXL.

## 3 MICHAEL MYERS PIN \$14.00

Halloween fans rejoice! Your favourite Haddonfield resident is now on an enamel pin by Creeper Co. with articulated knee that moves up and down in a stabbing motion! Tremor at its 1.5" length, soft enamel and polished gunmetal finish.

## 4 NEEDFUL THINGS SPECIAL EDITION NAIL POLISH SET \$25 - \$45

Try the Needful Things exclusive by Fiendish Fancies: sextoned, poured, cruelty-free, vegan nail polishes inspired by horror films and TV shows! Colour palette includes The Dead Wife, Penny Dreadfuls, Curses & Creatures, Aliens, Invasion and (our fave) a custom Rue Morgue colour, Talking Spirits. Sets available in men or full size bottles.

All prices in USD unless otherwise indicated.  
Items available at Rue Morgue.com until  
Tuesday, October 29

1



2



3



4



CRYPTIC  
COLLECTIBLES

HORROR ACTION COLOURING BOOK

Editor: Andrew Goodall Publishing Ltd., 1999

UK-based World Publishing released this colouring book featuring cover artwork depicting various Universal, Hammer and Amicus characters inside, kids were invited to drawings they could colour of Vincent Price from The Abominable Dr. Phibes, Peter Cushing from The Skull, Ingrid Pitt

from The Vampire Lovers and Lon Chaney's Erik from Phantom of the Opera. At the time of this writing, no copies of this very rare book are listed for sale online.

JAMES BURNELL

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# TAKE ME TO THE OTHER SIDE

BY APRIL SNELLINGS

**T**HE 1890s WERE A LOVELY TIME FOR THE MORBIDLY INCLINED.

It was the decade that saw the birth of the gory British stage shows known as the Grand Guignol, when considered the heaviest of slashers—Robert W. Chambers' essential *True Detective* tapper *The King in Yellow* was published in 1895, with H.P. Lovecraft's great-scale story *The Hound of Chillon* following in 1896. The next year saw the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; Henry James' classic ghost story *The Turn of the Screw* appeared the year after.

But if you craved a more direct experience with the supernatural, there was a new product that you absolutely had to own: the Ouija board. Ostensibly "invented" in 1840 (more on that later), the Ouija gave the users of the burgeoning Spiritualist craze—a movement defined by the belief that the living could communicate with the dead—to become a bona fide cultural phenomenon.

The Ouija boards produced by Kienner today are remarkably similar to the boards that were manufactured by the Kienner Novelty Company in 1897, just a few months after a Baltimore attorney named Elijah Bond filed the original patent in May 1896. For 125 years, Ouija has remained essentially unchanged: a flat, easily portable surface on which the alphabet is printed in two columns, with the numbers 0 to 9 at the bottom and some variation of the words "Yes," "No," and "Goodbye" placed strategically around the edges. The user interface is also the same: a small pointer called a "planchette" that glides across the board, pressing occasionally to indicate words, numbers or letters. Today you can expect to shell out about \$19.99 USD for a new Ouija board; in 1897, it would have set you back \$1.50.

Your great-grandmother could probably tell you how to use it: place your fingertips lightly on the edges of the planchette, ask the board a question, and wait for it to spell out an answer. Four chances of "contacting the beyond" are considerably higher than two or more people finger up to the planchette, there's a special channel to Ouija that has always contributed to its appeal.

Though various people associated with the Kienner Novelty Company are often credited with inventing the Ouija board, the truth is, they didn't. They

just figured out how to market it: "Talking boards"—or "witch boards" or "spirit boards," if you want to give it some flare—had been around for several years before the company stopped a brand name on them and started selling them as quickly as they could produce them. They were a natural extension of

other spirit communication methods that were popular at the time, such as table tipping, a light ball falling and automatic writing. (See sidebar.) We don't know exactly when or where talking boards were invented, but, thanks to an article by the Associated Press in 1936, we know that four-made versions of them were all the rage in Massachusetts years before the first Ouija boards hit stores.

Even that so-called account of what would become the Ouija board had a dark side, hinting at inherently obsessive and loopy groundwork for the prototypical Ouija-board-writing tale. The article that probably inspired Ouija's creation, which originally appeared in the *New York Daily Tribune* on March 26, 1886, told of a man who was so disturbed by his family's preoccupation with a talking board that he took it upon himself to destroy it.

"I know of a gentleman whose family became so interested in playing with the whirling thing that he turned it up," says the article. "The case might be started out of town on a business trip. The members of his family looked for the board and could not find it. They got a sensation to make these a new one. These two of them sat down and asked what had become of the other table. The answer was spelled out, giving a name, 'Jack turned it up.'"

Whatever its origin, the Ouija has had remarkable staying power. Scores of spirit communication devices were manufactured during the Spiritualist boom, but Ouija is the one that stuck. You're probably never attended a séance party where the hostess dug out a Baham & Co. Telegraphic Spirit Communication or a





Princeton Novelty Company Saint. Finger, but chances are you've managed to speak yourself with a Ouija board at some point in your life.

The manufacturing history of the board is a long, sordid tale of often-fighting family feuds and corporate wars. After the last year of the board's production, Charles Kennard, also known as Kennard Novelty Company was named, and two other founders were pushed out. It wasn't an amicable split; Kennard claimed that he dismissed the board, and would go on to launch a number of [unsuccessful] attempts to take a piece of the talking board industry.

Meanwhile, business boomed for Ouija's manufacturers, who would quickly change their name from Kennard Novelty Company to Ouija Novelty Company and build more factories to keep up with the public's newly insatiable demand. A young man named William Fuld had worked for the company as a printer and typesetter, but he was also one of its original stockholders, and the company flourished under his guidance. Fuld bought his brother, Isaac, into the fold, but that relationship would also end badly when Isaac was edged out of the Ouija business, sparking a Fuld family feud that would last until William and Isaac's grandchildren finally decided to let bygones be bygones in 1997.

William Fuld remained Ouija's champion until 1927, when he fell to his death from the roof of one of his Ouija factories. According to legend, the board told him to build the factory, but it apparently neglected to warn him about the faulty railing support he would one day lean against while supervising the installation of a flagpole. He fell three stories and died with a broken rib pierced his heart. Fuld's family continued to make the board until the brand was sold to newer brothers in 1966, that company was in turn absorbed by Hobbie in 1969.

IN 1996  
FULD: 67



*Assured star: A trade pamphlet for the Ouija board (top) board manufacturer William Fuld, and depicts a storefront display.*

after, the Ouija board has been in constant production for 195 years. Millions have been sold, and the boards have become an indelible part of our cultural fabric. In 1920, Norman Rockwell immortalized Ouija on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*. In 1963, poet James Merrill won a National Book Critics Circle Award for *The Changing Light at Sandover*, an epic poem he insisted he composed with the help of a homemade talking board.

But as Ouija's popularity grew, its dark side got, well, darker. In December 1918, a woman wrote to Fuld and told him that an evil entity had reached her through the board. "Night and day the voice of that devil talked to me," she wrote. "I hardly dare do any more work than the me for and I would not believe the awful things or do the wicked things I was told to do and if I did would

be rewarded beyond measure."

Stories of people driven to madness by Ouija boards can begin to pop up in newspaper columns America. "18-Cents Ouija boards keep women prisoners in mystery houses," read a 1920 headline referencing a horror case of Ouija-induced mass hysteria in a small California town. In 1923, a fifteen-year-old girl shot her father to death, supposedly at the behest of a board, prompting the headline "When the Ouija board speaks 'D-D-D-D-Y M-M-M-Y D-D-E-E'." Two years later, in Kansas City, women claimed the board told her that her 77-year-old husband was not only cheating on her but also having a torrid affair with her. She knocked the man unconscious, took him to a bed, and proceeded to torture him mercilessly until he shot her to death with a pistol left within his reach.

Pop culture, particularly movies, also contributed to the Ouija board's gradual shift from novelty to menace. In 1960, William Castle's 73 Minutes featured a chilling scene of a Ouija board apparently predicting a character's death, years later, *The Exorcist* (1973) portrayed the board as a doorway to demonic possession. Other movies, such as 1988's *Midnight*, 2007's *Paranormal Activity* and 2014's much-debated *Ouija*, have since built on the board's eerie reputation and even contributed new waves of Ouija lore. (For more on the *Ouija* board in film, see p. 24.)

Even so, we're intrigued more by its history, though, is the question of why the board seems to work.

Many think the planchette is being moved by entities from the spirit world, while others believe the board works by establishing a telepathic link between users. The explanation came out by science, though, is that the planchette is being controlled by our subconscious movements—small, unconscious motions that we can't help making, such as poker tells or moaning your fingers when you're thinking about lying your shoes. We make those movements all the time, but our conscious mind typically ignores the action.

The *Ouija* board essentially removes that filter, because you can't be sure if it's your own hiccups and flicks or someone else's that are causing the planchette to move. Your subconscious gets a raw shot at the other's soul, and before you can say "Captain Jack," you're well on your way to loving the loins on for the rest of your life.

But here's the really cool thing about the "mystifying oracle," where



you skeptics or discount any sort of supernatural explanation as to why it works, it doesn't become any less fascinating. Some researchers believe the Ouija board could be a valuable tool in helping us learn more about non-conscious thought, and could even have applications leading to new neurological diagnoses before more traditional methods can detect them. There are legitimate scientific and academic institutions, such as the Inner Mind Project at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver's Cognitive Lab, that actually use the boards to learn more about the human brain and how it works. Predictably, though, grant organizations aren't lining up to fund any study whose proposal begins with, "Okay, we're going to take a Ouija board..."

So, for the foreseeable future, *Ouija* is determined to hold on to at least a few of its secrets.

In the meantime, we've assembled a panel of experts to help us pull back the veil and sort out the mystery of the Ouija board. Robert Murch, *Ouija* historian and chairman of the Talking Board Historical Society, Mitch Horowitz, author of the 2010 book *Occult America* (Bantam), Joanna Ebenerson, founder of Brooklyn's *Marble Anatomy Museum*, and famed mentalist *The Amazing Kresley*.

Now, tight a circle, close the lights, and think of a question...

#### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE OUIJA BOARD?

**MITCH HOROWITZ:** On the surface, *Ouija* is just a drink-wrapped game board that gets sold on the pawn shop, at Risk or Monopoly Day, in reality. It's the idea remaining about from the age of Spiritualism — the 19th-century movement that practiced talking to the dead — that remains widely used today.

**JOANNA EBENERSOHN:** It's a board you can buy on eBay, but most private play with it takes place either at a séance party or in a graveyard, with which you attempt to make contact with the dead or, as I think psychologists would say, with your unconscious mind.

**ROBERT MURCH:** *Ouija* is important because it's a trademark, or a brand. It's been in continuous use since 1890, currently owned by Hasbro. *Ouija* is really just one of many talking boards, and the talking board mostly kind of all of the spiritualist community into pop culture in 1998 in Ohio, where a small article is published about a man whose experience



#### PROMPT SERVICE

his frustration with his flashlight use of these talking boards and not doing anything else. What they're talking about is a flat surface that has letters and numbers and some words on it — "Yes," "No," "Good bye," "Good night," which becomes "Goodbye" later on — and another little table on the top that people place their fingers on as they ask a question. And that little table would move and stop, and point out these letters and numbers, thereby answering a question or spelling out some message from the beyond.

#### WHY DO YOU THINK THEY WORK?

**MR.:** That's a mystery. The most common answer is that people are unconsciously pushing the pointer, or planchette. But that doesn't cover all the aspects of wonder associated with the board, including the really personal and totally framed "messages" that appear to come through it. Crafts must remain be damned, I refuse to categorically rule out metaphysical possibilities.

**JE:** To be honest, it never worked for me. When I was a kid, we tried all the time, and nothing strange every happened for me. I also went up to Lily Dale, which is the place where the Spiritualists all practice, and tried table tipping. I tried spoon bending, I tried doing all the things you're supposed to do, and most things didn't work for me. I think I have the wrong brain for it. I'm too critical or something. Table tipping [jujitsu, table turning, involve users placing their hands on a table and contacting spirits, which reply by tilting the table in different directions] eventually did work for me, though, and I've had some weird experiences with other things. I don't doubt there are other ways of knowing things I've played with tarot cards and I've had classes. I write down that come true almost literally, so I know that there are many things I don't understand about how the world works, and our natural ways of knowing, but *Ouija* boards have not done that for me, for whatever reason.

**TM-Schmidt:** believe that when you're playing the board you open a door in your mind, and that your subconscious winds the board to work. So you are putting the planchette, unbeknownst to you, and that's what's spelling out the answers. And then you have psychics, who would say there's a form of telepathy going on — that the cards are reading each other's minds. They don't know it, but the answers are coming from each other. And then there's the belief that it's really at the core of what talking boards were made for, and that was to make contact with something outside of the users. Not you, not your subconscious, not other players, some of the people in the room who are doing — something that is beyond that. Personally, I believe there is magic to these talking boards. Anyone who's ever sat down and used one and feels the planchette move, knows that something's going on. What is that? It's possible to talk to the dead? That's a question that just has never been answered. It works because we want to. That's the real answer.

**THE AMAZING KRESLEY:** I think it's the unconscious mind. I'm not arguing with people who believe in rapid communication and so forth. But I do believe some kind of paranormal phenomenon takes place when the unconscious is tapped into, because too much has happened through the years where dramatic revelations have come through that are not easy to make. But I don't really think it's supernatural. I think it's a hyper-rational, a model-gifted, intuitive force. The truth of the matter is the *Ouija* board, in a sense, is a glamorous form of intuition.

#### WHY DO THEY GENERALLY NEED AT LEAST TWO PEOPLE TO WORK?

**MR.:** That's the most common practice, but one person alone can use the board. But...

*Confession:*



TALKING BOARD HISTORIAN AND COLLECTOR  
BRANDON HODGE HELPS US TRACE THE  
STRANGE HISTORY OF THE PLANCHETTE

# GHASTLY WRITERS

BY APRIL SNELLINGS

**O**N ITS OWN, A OULIA BOARD IS ABOUT AS MYSTICAL AS A BAG OF SCRABBLE TILES. For all the board's vaguely occult iconography and the off-the-charts creep factor ascribed to it by movies such as *13 Ghosts* and *The Exorcist*, it's just a useless slab of wood (or chipboard), if you're contacting the beyond on a lunge without the planchette that comes with it. For those who believe a talking board is truly a hotline to the beyond, the board simply gives the dead a vocabulary — it's the planchette that gives them a voice.

Though they're mostly known as Ouija accessories today, planchettes actually predominate talking boards by several decades, and were once popular spirit communication tools in their own right. In fact, the first known mention of what would eventually become the Ouija board referred to it as "the New Planchette."

Brandon Hodge, an Austin-based planchette collector and researcher, has spent the better part of two decades slogging the dusty corners of weird history for information about the devices. He says we can trace the planchette to June 18, 1853 — nearly 40 years before the first Ouija boards went on the market.

"They were originally invented as a spirit communication device that was meant to facilitate and expedite communication with the dead," Hodge explains.

The key word there is "expedite." By the time planchettes were invented, ghostly communication was already a full-fledged sensation thanks to the Spiritualist movement, which got a jumpstart in 1840 when

the Fox sisters in Hydesville, New York, supposedly began receiving messages from the ghost of a murdered seafarer via loud knocking sounds, a process that would come to be known as "spirit rapping." Séances became an incredibly popular pastime, and by 1853, a fad called "table turning" or "table tipping" had spread all across the US, Canada and Europe.

Hodge explains the process: "Everyone puts their hands on the table and calls out questions to the ether, and it will rap out responses by lifting or tilting mysteriously and banging on the floor. You can ask affirmative or negative questions. For instance, you can say, 'Is the spirit of my father here?' Tap once for yes, twice for no.' Or you could perform something called 'alphabet calling,' which is where you actually call out the alphabet to the ether and then wait for a response to indicate which letter the spirits would like to select."

Whatever method a medium used, the results were often convincing. (You can decide for yourself whether or not séances were chaffing up the dead, or simply being hoodwinked by scam artists or fooled by the same ideomotor movements that likely power the Ouija board's planchette.) But the process could be time-consuming and mind-numbingly boring, by the time the dead spoiled out a lengthy message, you were considerably closer to being able to just ask them your question first hand.

"The most you can get is about 240 characters an hour, even if you know what message you're trying to spell out," Hodge says. "That's less than two tweets in one hour."

There was also automatic writing, wherein a medium would enter a trance-like state and scribble out messages from the hereafter. Again, this produced convincing communications, but the challenge lay in deciphering page after page of barely legible scrawl.

A number of inventors turned their attention to finding a quicker alternative, but it wasn't until 1883 that a spirit communication device would really begin to catch on.



"The story goes that the spirits in a séance in France suggested to the sitters to go into the next room and get a basket, turn it upside down and thrust a pencil through it," Hodge explains. "Then the spirit supposedly told them, 'Now everyone place your hands on the basket instead of the table, and I'm going to write out messages for you.' So that's the invention of the planchette on June 16, 1853 — it's literally the spirits saying, 'Let's hurry this up.' It takes the movement of the tapping tables with the concept of automatic writing and merges them into a small device. In that case it was a basket, but by the 1860s, we have a cottage industry that's going to spring up producing these planchettes."

Planchettes were popular with Spiritualists for the following decade, but they would leap into mainstream culture in 1867, following the appearance of a sensational article in a British publication called *Once a Week*. That article would be reprinted in the US in 1868, and soon planchettes were everywhere.

"Keep in mind, we've already got a long history of planchettes at this point," Hodge notes. "They've been around for fifteen years, but only in Spiritualist circles. We have evidence there's a cabinetmaker in France who's making them through the 1850s. We know that an architectural manufacturer in the UK started making them in 1858. And we also know that they were available here in America... But they just sort of languished until that sensational article sparks this incredible desire for people to own these things. It really does become the must-have gift item for that season, like the yo-yo or the Hula Hoop. One manufacturer, Kirby and Company, claimed they sold over 200,000 planchettes in this holiday season that year."

As sensational as the planchette may have been, there was also a somber undercurrent to its appeal. The device enjoyed its first big surge in popularity just a few years after the end of the Civil War, which claimed more than 620,000 lives in America.

"The end of the Civil War in 1865 marked the greatest period of bloodshed in our country," Hodge says. "So, just three years in its wake, you've got a lot of people who have lost a lot of family members not long before. When this article comes out claiming that you can speak to the spirits with this device, that's going to have an incredible effect on the desire to acquire one. We will find throughout the history of spirit communication devices, whether it be the Civil War or WWI or WWII, that the loss of life is going to go hand in hand with the popularity of those devices. Their great surges come in the wake of great conflict."

The popularity of the planchette would

*What is on... moment of joy... the joy of the spirit when it tells you the good it has done, to you of this world please...*



(The Planchette at work.)



**Talk Through the Dead** (clockwise from top) Early automatic writing specimen from May 28, 1863, printed in Judge John Fairbanks' *Spiritualist*; George Blackie & Company's 'Mysterious Planchette'; Norman Rockwell's illustration for the May 1, 1933 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*; a purported source photo; and George Blackie & Company's illustration of its planchette

and were for the next two decades, but it would remain the most iconic spirit communication device on the market until 1891, when the first Ouija boards began showing up on store shelves. With the invention of talking boards, the planchette made what appears to be its final evolution as a pointer rather than a collaborative writing device.

So the planchette became an indispensable part of the Ouija-board package, but Hodge thinks the device played another important role in helping Ouija catch on. The board's manufacturers took an important cue from the makers of planchettes, who were clever enough to be ambiguous about what makes the device move.

"You sometimes just see it marketed as 'Planchette' with a capital P, the same way we

see 'Ouija' with a capital O," Hodge points out. "It's a proper noun. Ask Planchette: It's shipped largely of its Spiritualist connotations, and so it has a broader appeal to those who might see séance activity as not particularly wholesome. If you can just ask Planchette a question, it's the 'mysterious oracle' rather than something that requires you to fully commit to the belief that you're breaching the veil of the dead. The manufacturers of Ouija are also going to lower their question open, and it's one of the grand victories of their marketing."





please, just forget I said that on the spot early, early afternoon.

**JB:** I've done table toping. When I had my hand on the table, I remember feeling this kind

of tingling, and I pulled away — it made me uncomfortable, which is probably why those things don't work for me, and I pulled my arm away and it stopped. But then, when it didn't again, I trusted myself to it, and that's when it started to work and the table started to move. Maybe there's just some energy that happens that we don't understand, that all these people thinking this thing, I don't know.

**RM:** When you do it collaboratively and you have a group of people playing, it's interesting. Just like any group of people you know together, it starts to figure out who's the leader. Whose subconscious is stronger? That's what occultists believe. And that's why in the beginning it's very jerky and doesn't move very smoothly, but it works itself out.

**TAK:** Understand that in the case of some individuals, it does work very well with one person. But we're not used to detaching our conscious thinking and adjusting our activity to an unconscious level and tapping into it readily, and I think part of the reason it given away in my performance, when I'm reading the thoughts of all strangers in the audience, it's a two-way situation. It occurs that the hostess here a reciprocal relationship or collaboration that reinforces the phenomenon. No question, I would not advise most people to play around with the Ouija board alone, because they're only going to frustrate themselves when it doesn't work. But when you have someone else, their input helps it to work. I think that's the key.

**THE OUIJA BOARD WASN'T THE FIRST TALKING BOARD. WHY DID THE ONES THAT PRECEDED IT FADE OUT WHILE THE OUIJA CAUGHT FIRE?**

**RM:** Ouija's success is really kind of interesting because we know a company called the W.S. Ford Company in Leicester, Massachusetts, made a "wack board" in 1896 that they described exactly like the talking board that also came up in 1896, and they sent it to President Grover Cleveland in the White House as a wedding gift. But why doesn't it take off like Ouija? The makers of Ouija like this talking board, branding it with a name, among the fact they had to go to the patent office and prove it worked, offering a prize of \$500 to anyone who could solve the mystery of how it



All Hands On Deck: The *Brain Mystery Talking Board* in action in the mid-1940s, and (opposite) Milton Bradley's *Kibble's ESP Ouija-Bo* came from the 1930s

worked — all of these things were brilliant. And they didn't get there in it as a way to talk to the dead. You would address it as "Ouija." "Ouija, tell me this." So you could talk to the dead, you could ask psychic questions, you could do anything you wanted to and that was okay with the people who made it, as long as you brought it.

**EARLY INSTRUCTIONS SPECIFIED THAT A "LADY AND GENTLEMAN (ARE) PREFERRED" WAS THERE AN IMPACT SEXUAL ANGLE, AND COULD THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE OUIJA BOARD'S POPULARITY?**

**RM:** Many occult practices have some kind of a sexual charge around them. This was true, for example, of hypnosis, or Mesmerism as it was called in the late 1700s and much of the 1800s. Slightly classier, a trance state, evening time, a dimmed parlor — much of the traditional occult setting is sexual, and this was true for Ouija, too. The manufacturer subtly promoted this view on its vintage boxes by showing a man and woman using the board knee to knee.

**JB:** What that makes me think of is how a lot of the most important Spiritualists were women, and I've always thought there was an unspoken erotic element to that. There was an exhibition of spirit photography at the Neapolitan Museum of Art called *The Perfect Medium*, and it was amazing. One of the things you really got in this kind of exorcism. A lot of the women end up naked or somewhat undressed. And it was also one of the few places in which a woman could be a powerful figure. So I think there is something there, but it would be hard for me to pinpoint exactly what it is. But I think there is a sexual charge. Maybe they were playing on that as a parlor game, because I was a selling point to have a man and a woman sitting together with their knees touching in a

sensual frame that's also charged spiritually because you're waiting for the so-called messages from the beyond. Whether that's just a grandiose tactic or whether things are more likely to happen when there's that sexual attraction, I don't know.

**RM:** The Ouija board broke among Victorian elites, in Victorian times, you're not supposed to be alone with a woman. You're not supposed to be touching them. And to be sitting together with your knees touching and fingers touching on the planchette, and you're playing at night with candles — that's like downright. So the guy's playing because he wants to get with the girl, the girl's playing because she wants to be with him, but she also wants to make contact with the other side. Norman Rockwell, in May of 1946, captured that some in pop culture forever. You see her looking up to the ether, and he's got a mark on his face, maybe kind of looking at her blouse. How else never change, right? It's always the same thing.

**TAK:** One of the appeals of sciences and what have you, which were tremendously popular in the 1920s up until about the 1920s and '30s, is that it was one of the very few esoteric phenomena that allowed people to sit in a dimmed room and touch each other. That is one of the main reasons for the popularity of spirit mediums.

**KRESKIN, YOU PUT OUT YOUR OWN VERSION OF A TALKING BOARD IN THE 1930s. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT IT?**

**TAK:** I always like to think that I've given some credit for history repeating itself, because I simplified the phenomenon and borrowed from the past, and in the late 1920s and early 1930s Milton Bradley put out the *Kibble's ESP* game. While it dealt with how people could find each other for telepathy and what have you, I included a parlor game in the game where people could hold it between each other and



get "yes" and "no" answers is depending on how it moved, which is as a job of the Oja board. It has the white alphabet in a circle around the board, so if a person holds the pendulum, it could swing in the direction of letters and also numbers. So people could say it was a modification of the Oja board, but it actually was easier for people to handle because it was just holding a pendulum in a circle. It was a great success.

**IF THERE IS A SPIRITUAL REALITY, DO YOU THINK THE OJA BOARD COULD POTENTIALLY BE USED TO ACCESS IT?**

**MR:** Believers in every quarter of our American spiritual culture employ objects to get in touch with the ineffable, whether it is holy water, sacred relics, wickiwoos or the red Kabbalah string. I'm wearing on my wrist. So, for believers, I don't think there's any use to be made against the possibility of a spirit board. But I'm not trying to deceive your spiritualists. My simple answer is yes. There is absolutely no disproof of an unseen aspect to life and, as a friend of mine likes to point out, "Something only has to be a little bit true to change everything." I personally consider Oja's "a little bit true."

**JE:** They've never done anything for me, but if they're giving someone something, I think they're great tools. I feel the same way about tarot. Something happens when I play tarot. Does it say anything about the world beyond myself? I don't know. But it's a great tool, and it seems to lead me somehow that all it's doing is channeling my unconscious. I wouldn't make a bit of difference to me. I don't know what it is, I just know that it helps me find realizations I couldn't have found in another way. It's an indirect way of accessing what's hidden from us, whether that thing is hidden from view to the spirit world or the unconscious.

**HAVE YOU EVER HAD A STRANGE EXPERIENCE WITH A OJA BOARD?**

**MR:** I haven't had any green-sold vomiting, bed-leaving, light-pink-out experiences with Oja. But some of my friends have. The weirdest thing that happened to me is years ago, when I was first thinking of writing about Oja. I was considering experimenting with the board — which I told no one about. One day, out of the blue, a

stranger walked into my room, "I got the sense you're considering playing around with a Oja board, and I want to warn you about it."

**JE:** I've played the Oja board the entire of time. There are times when it's obviously coming from the users' subconscious, and then there are times when I've observed an experience I just can't explain. Is it a psychic experience, or something more? Who knows? The answer had that experience that it made me feel absolutely that the Oja board allows you to talk to the dead, but I've had enough weird experiences that I keep talking. And I think I represent most people when I say, I want to believe. I want to believe the short time I have on this earth exists in some way afterward.

**DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY REMAINING ASSOCIATED WITH ITS USE?**

**MR:** Absolutely. By whatever mechanism the board works — whether someone is pushing the placards or it's actually an aid — a lot of people report frightening, deeply disorienting experiences. There are few happy endings associated with Oja. The poet Ted Hughes wrote, "We've had news from the Oja board" — the board had predicted the death of his estranged wife Sylvia Plath, as he wrote.

**JE:** I don't know. I've never heard a story of someone getting messed up from it, but I suppose if you were a person who had a tendency already for mental illness, this could add fuel to your fire. If you want to look at the psychological model and say that you're channeling voices both within yourself, maybe that could be dangerous if you're the wrong kind of person.

**MR:** I did a long, long interview with Lorraine Warren, the godmother [of paranormal investigation]. I love Oja boards, she hates Oja boards. We totally agreed on one thing, which is, if there's danger, there's equal danger in all of these devices because what you are doing is compelling. You are asking something to you to answer a question. You are initiating the contact. Whether you do that through tarot cards, crystal balls, ESP, wordless, whatever — we don't make the rules.

**MITCH, IN OCCULT AMERICA, YOU WRITE, "ONE OF THE MOST NOTABLE**

**CHARACTERISTICS OF OJA LORE IS THE VAST — AND SOMETIMES ALTERNATELY FRIGHTENING — HISTORY OF STORIES REPORTED BY USERS." IN YOUR OPINION, DO THESE ACCOUNTS SUGGEST THAT SOME PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE GENUINE PARANORMAL EXPERIENCES USING THE OJA?**

**MR:** I don't think the question of the paranormal can be decided if one is connected to examining all the possibilities, and not chasing something off the list in a pre-formed manner. Another possibility is that we harbour gremlins and hostilities in our subconscious that we do not like to face — just look at the hostility that goes on out of social media. It's more frightening than anything else, is a crime. Oja could be a mechanical, if unconscious, disclosure of that same phenomenon where, stripped of personal accountability, people let loose with all kinds of hatred and anger.

**OJA RESEARCHERS OFTEN CITE A CORRELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL UPHOUL AND THE POPULARITY OF THE BOARDS. WHY IS THAT?**

**MR:** What they're interesting is Oja's a peak in popularity during periods of war, which is true. Sales grew during the First and Second World Wars. People were suffering from terrible losses and grasping for ways to make contact.

**MR:** Today, if you walked into a house and saw a bunch of people playing the Oja board, you might think, "What the hell is going on here?" But if you walked into a séance or any spirit-conversation session in the mid-1900s, it would be commonplace. And not just because it was the rise of Spiritualism in America and what just because it was a lot, but if you just looked at what was happening, which was this massive death in America, Disease was real pain — people would have early children and had of them would die. And once you throw in the Gulf War, when everyone lost a father, an uncle, a cousin, a son, a grandson, and these people didn't just die, they went away and disappeared. So there were all these questions: Where did they go? What happened to my loved one? And there was nothing that could answer them. And then, the talking board, as many spirit communication devices people had tried, became something people turned to to answer that question.





FOR NEARLY A CENTURY, MOVIES HAVE  
SHAPED THE WAY WE SEE TALKING BOARDS  
AS A WICKED GATEWAY TO THE SPIRIT WORLD

BY  
RONNI  
THOMAS

# CINEMA OUIJA



**S**INCE THE TIME WHEN OUIJA BOARDS WERE PRODUCED AS A CONSUMER NOVELTY, apoc-

calypse as to their demonic and potentially dangerous influence was shared by both religious fanatics as well as members of the *New Age*. The myth about the ominous, mystical powers of the boards was reinforced by Hollywood throughout the ages, going back to the silent era.

The board's first appearance was most likely 1930's *Duke Board*, a part two-action, part animated short featuring *Koko the Clown*. (It's easy to find on YouTube.) Part of the *Duke of the Devil* series, it was created by Max Fleischer, who was also known for his *Betty Boop*, *Popeye*, and *Superman* cartoons. Here, the board is used by a supernatural junior and two sceptical animators, while at the same time *Koko* is drawn into a scene with a ghost-filled haunted house.

He manages to jump off the page into the real world, where he crawls under the planchette and shocks the users

by making the board speak without them even touching it. Though farcical, it sets the tone for the board's reputation as a harbinger of bad omens.

Then, in 1944, the Ouija board makes a particularly memorable appearance in the haunted house movie *The Uninvited*. This film presents it not as a novelty board but a series of letters written around the table with a glass used as the planchette. It's the contrivance of a séance performed by siblings, played by Ray Milland and Ruth Hussey, to communicate with the previous owner of their new home. Interestingly, they use the board in its original incarnation: a tool to converse with the dead during Spiritist séances. Here, no demon is unleashed, the board simply helps them—though chillingly—in make contact with the deceased spirit that seems to be “haunting” the recently purchased house.

The Ouija board's demonic connotations were cemented in 1973, with a chilling appearance in *The Exorcist*. The board, considered by most at the time to be a children's party game, is used by Regan (Linda Blair) as she communicates with “Captain Howdy.” Oddly, though Regan's mother is suspicious of the strange board, she makes no overt connection between it and the horrors to come. However, audiences recognized it as the conduit that allowed the demon Paimon to possess the girl, and from this point on, the board is seen both in film and pop culture as something ghou-







**Bound demons:** In the *Exorcist* Regan plays blind seeress "Catherine Harvey," while her mom, Chris (Ellen Burstyn), looks on, and plot lines the above tape on a board in 1983's *Ouija Board*

lately dangerous. Thrill-seekers caused *Ouija* sales to skyrocket after the film.

The board itself finally became the focus in 1985's *Witchboard*. Here, it's capable of channeling both spirits of benevolent helper ghosts and malignant evil spirits—specifically the demon Malboro. Throughout the film, Linda (Tawney Knight), who begins her relationship with the board in a positive light when it helps her find a lost ring, becomes increasingly more possessed by the demonic entity breaking into our world. She's eventually overcome by the spirit and fully possessed. For the movie's premiere, *Witchboard*-themed *Ouija* boards were once handed out to attendees. Malevolent spirit-board antics continued in two sequels, *Witchboard 2: The Devil's Doorway* (1993) and *Witchboard III: The Possession* (1995).

In addition to these movies, the *Ouija* board had made cartrios in many other horror films over the years, including William Castle's 73



*Ghost* (1986, pictured opposite) and *Poltergeist Activity* (2008). The past decade or so has seen many low-budget horror titles from all over the world focused on the boards and people invoking evil forces through them, including 2003's *Ouija* (from Spain), 2007 Filipino film *Sorcerer* (a.k.a. *Ouija*), the 2008 Egyptian release *Ouija* (seeing a pattern here?), the 2009 British movie *Ouija Board*, the 2011 American indie *The Ouija Experiment* and its 2015 sequel *Theater of Death*. The highest profile of the bunch was this year's widely released *Ouija*, despite scathing reviews. Distributed by Universal, it earned more than \$100 million worldwide (on a \$5 million budget) and a sequel is already in the works. Curiously, it was produced by *Ouija* copyright holders Inara, demonstrating that the company wants to cement the board's reputation as something evil. You don't have to ask the board to know that when it comes to *Ouija* boards and cinema, supernatural evil always sets

**DESCRIBE THE IMPACT OF THE EXORCIST ON HOW WE THINK ABOUT OUIJA**  
100-306

**MR:** For most people, *The Exorcist* remains probably the most "real" horror film ever made. Many people saw it as a dramatization of truth. It touched a religious chord in many people. The fact that Regan closed it for good, a door with *Ouija* left woven with a definite impression that *Ouija* was a portal to darkness, which added to its already frightening reputation.

**JD:** I see that as being more a function of the terror drive—warriors than really being about the *Ouija* board. I don't see the board as being instrumental to that, as much as just the idea that everything life can lead to possession. It's like *Acquainted's* *Duty and Pledge*—it creates the perfect, mundane reality, and then the thing happens in that position we've already accepted as normal, and at times everything as its head. In the case of *The Exorcist* and the *Ouija* board, it was an expression of something people were already worried about.

**MR:** If we track the *Ouija* board through movies and music, going all the way back to sheet music and silent movies, we watch it go from being something funny, to something a little sinister. There was always a segment of the population who thought *Ouija* boards were bad, that it was bad to talk to the dead, the fact that the overwhelming public did believe that again. And then a movie comes along in 1973 called *The Exorcist*, which is based on the real story of a boy that was believed to be possessed by a demon. There had been many rumors the boy had used a *Ouija* board, and so William Peter Blatty, in his book and then the screenplay, integrates that into a very small scene. It's very innocuous. All we know is Regan uses the *Ouija* board alone, that she's talking to someone named Catherine Harvey, and then she becomes possessed. I think *The Exorcist* did something unique to the *Ouija* board—something very well like what Alfred Hitchcock did for the shower. It took something that everyone does, that everyone can relate to, and made it frightening.

**TODAY IT'S COMMON FOR BELIEVERS GROUPS TO FROWN UPON THE OUIJA BOARD. DOES THAT CONFLICT ALWAYS EXIST?**

**MR:** Not precisely. There were churches in America, such as the Swedenborgian church, where



medianship and stardom were defined as valid manifestations of non-physical communication. An ancestor to the Bush presidential clan, the Rev. George Bush, held a Swedenborgian belief in the mid-19th century in New York City from which he defended the plausibility of channeling and mediumship. Many 19th-century occultists considered themselves Christian. This was true of Renaissance occultists, too.

**JE:** I don't really know, but I would love to pass it's power, and it become a big deal once it becomes a thing kids played with and wasn't just a tool used by adults. To be a Spiritboard doesn't mean you're not a Christian, but to fuck around with something that might let the Devil in is a serious.

**IN OUR INCREASINGLY HIGH-TECH, DIGITAL WORLD, ARE OUIJA BOARDS MORE RELEVANT OR LESS RELEVANT THAN THEY WERE 125 YEARS AGO?**

**RM:** We have so few tactile experiences at this point in the digital age — we "experience" things at a remove, we hold in our hands lenses and fewer objects, such as photos, records or printed matter. We play chess, Monopoly and video games online. And I won't begin to address the social questions. Ouija is a ritual riddler-to-the-real-experience today.

**JE:** I think people use them differently now. I think they're less relevant. When they came out, I think people really thought of them as a tool with which they could communicate with their dead loved ones and solve the questions of the universe, and now they're a children's toy. I don't think they're being very seriously. I know people who are doing all sorts of woo-woo stuff, and they're doing spirit circles and things like that. It's a very niche, outsider group that's doing it right now. And the thing that's so interesting to me

about Spiritism in the 19th century is...



*As you place the planchette on the board, you will receive answers to all your questions. The planchette will move of its own accord, and will always give you the right answer. It is a wonderful and useful device, and is a great help to all who use it.*

*When in use, it is a great help to all who use it. It is a wonderful and useful device, and is a great help to all who use it.*



it was a huge group. It was not a niche, outsider group. This was a large, progressive movement. So I think it was much more relevant and people were more open-minded to it then. There were families gathered in parlors trying to contact the dead every night. I just think that's fabulous.

**RM:** The Ouija board is still relevant today because people are still dying. If you stop dying, no one's going to care about the Ouija board. Because we're still dying, and we're still experiencing this common thing, it's very relevant today. We still explore loss and the unknown.

**TAK:** When they were first manufactured, they were relevant in the sense that they were awakening a culture that had everybody from politicians to people who had a tough day-to-day job jumping through, and it was awakening them to the fact that there's information there that we don't have the answer to, that we can't anticipate, that's coming from a source we're not clear on. And you know what? Today, with all the electronic devices, with all the sophistication, with all our resources, we can't seem to stay the world and get off. This could be an opportunity for a respite, for a breather, and tapping into oneself. And for that reason, I think it's appropriate today as well.

**ULTIMATELY, WHAT'S THE REAL MYSTERY OF THE OUIJA BOARD?**

**RM:** The mystery is: "Who is behind the curtain?" Materialists will tell us the cards are moving the pointers, consciously or unconsciously, and that's that. But that's a lazy person's answer — it's reported by rote. This doesn't mean ghosts are moving the pointers, either. But the bones we use — anemones, spirit, ghost — do seem to obliterate the world that doesn't fit, because they tend to be perceived categorically. They induce us to select rather than to think. In a world where wires collapse into particles and particles simultaneously appear in multiple places, we haven't the first idea of what's going on during a Ouija session, unless we're telepathically doing it to the "honey" anyway. But if that kind of thinking

only too broadly applied, we will slowly stop asking the questions of life, such as: "What's over the horizon?" Ouija is a tool we can't quite use beyond — but we're hearing voices over there, and it's too tempting not to look.

**JE:** I think it's the unknown. I think it's the thrill and excitement and thrill of putting yourself in this situation where you don't know what's going to happen and you don't know why. It makes you feel so alive in the moment when you're waiting for that thing to happen. In a world that's really become so desensitized and we don't get the feeling of direct engagement and excitement, it makes you feel full of life, and marvel at the mystery of it.

**RM:** What's incredible about the Ouija board is it explains all the biggest questions about us. Why are we here? What happens when we're not here? The other things that are going that are the exploration of space, or going into the deep ocean. It's pretty creepy. The Ouija board looks intensely, and you're subconscious and your mind, instead of looking for answers externally. When you sit down at the Ouija, even if you're like, "Okay, this is bullshit, but I'm going to play because my friends want to play," you are entertaining the possibility that one day you might be on the other side of the board.

**TAK:** I think the resonance of the Ouija board is that it disperses a group of people — a writer who put a talking board together, people who were interested in Spiritism, people who wanted answers to questions — they all faced a common device. Whether they thought they were going to communicate with the dead or get some answers to some problems, whether they were going to search and see what kind of mysteries they could uncover — isn't it interesting that we come back to a little device that we're labeled at the Ouija board?

I think that's a great piece of cultural history.



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**W**HAT IS HORROR MUSIC? IT'S NOT AN EASY QUESTION. JUST AS HORROR FANS ARE TYPICALLY DRAWN TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF HORROR FILMS, FROM SLASHERS TO SUPERNATURAL THRILLERS, THERE'S NO ONE MUSICAL GENRE SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO HORROR FANS.

"Horror" has been linked to music in such diverse genres as Halloween novelty records for monster kids, heavy metal designed to offend parents, campy punk played in small clubs, and industrial noise-terrorists who create sounds that get under your skin. Horror also pops up in country, blues and hip hop. *Rue Morgue's* Audio Drama music section has always been more of an art than a science when it comes to finding the right balance of genres and artists that in some way utilize horror, whether through image, lyrics or sound. The following section compiles some of our favorite bands to appear in the magazine, and the records we deemed important, definitive and simply the best examples of horror in music. So what is horror music? Read on...



## BOBBY PICKETT AND THE CRYPT KICKERS

*The Original Monster Mash (1969)*  
Garpax Records

Hitting stores just in time for Halloween 1969, Bobby "Boris" Pickett's "Monster Mash" is not the first or best horror novelty rock record, but it's an endearing "groovy ditty" that perfectly captured the then-current monster kid craze. Showcasing Pickett's best Ratoff impression and a handful of spooky sound effects, the track is a take-off on the many classic crooners that swept the nation in the wake of the beat. While released as a single, it also appeared as part of this full-length LP of pun-filled monster pop, including the almost-as-good "Monster's Holiday," a Christmas-set sequel to his first hit. PG



## JOHN ZACHERLE

*Monster Mash (1967)*  
Parkway

Forced TV horror host Zacherle first released his underrated horror novelty single "Dinner with Drac" in 1966, but it also appeared on this kid-friendly album rushed out to capitalize on Pickett's "Monster Mash" success several years later. Zacherle's clever, incoherent wordplay makes this an early classic of the genre, as the host speaks through morbid lyrics on danceable tracks such as "Wald Walden" and "Gravy (With Some Gervoid)" that skewer other hits of the time. The album, one of five he released, helped Zacherle remain one of horror's biggest personalities, with many horror hosts later releasing their own tie-in LPs. PG



## ARTHUR BROWN

*The Crazy World of Arthur Brown (1968)*  
Track/Atlantic

Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson once said to Arthur Brown, "You probably don't have any idea who I am, but I've slipped off 50 percent of my vocals from you." In 1968 it was easy to understand people; they were buying Beatles and Hendrix records and then here comes Arthur Brown, dressed in Crowley-esque attire, leon headbonnets and skeletal makeup, tripping on acid, screeching wailing carnes and making the dust. He was so beyond his time that his act went over most heads, though the single "Fire" and his version of "I Put a Spell on You" are Halloween staples. With artists such as KISS, Alice Cooper and Iron Maiden citing him as direct influences, *The Crazy World of Arthur Brown* is paramount to the evolution of rock 'n' roll and heavy metal. AM



## BLACK SABBATH

*Black Sabbath (1970)*  
Vertigo

Just as Mario Bava's 1963 film of the same name changed the face of Italian horror forever, the Birmingham legends' apocalyptic debut altered the landscape of rock music, bringing proper heavy metal kicking and screaming into the public consciousness. Black Sabbath opens with the ominous bell toll of its funeral dirge title track, a slow-burning portrait of one man's descent into Hell, ostensibly establishing metal's long-standing relationship with horror and the Devil. Cloaked in an atmosphere of mysticism and the occult, the album also offers a song written from the point of view of Lucifer ("W.I.B.") and the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired "Behind the Wall of Sleep." Betwixt Tony Iommi's

menacing tone, ingenious riffs and iconic playing style created heavy metal, and this 45-year-old record still sounds as fresh, vibrant and vital as the day it was released. GP



## ALICE COOPER

*Welcome to My Nightmare (1975)*  
Globe/RS

The Alice Cooper band came out in early '70s edginess on late-night horror, ghoulish humor and highly theatrical stage shows, but when the rest of the band wanted to go back to rock 'n' roll basics, the legendary shock rocker did the only sane thing and released a solo album that would allow him to capital honor to its fullest potential. A loose concept album based around a boy named Stephen who is plagued by horrors both real and fantastic, *Welcome to My Nightmare* is remembered for its over-the-top stage show, its special and concert film, but remains the ultimate Alice Cooper experience because of the variety in style and lyrical themes, each representing an ingredient of the Alice character. There's the disco-friendly title track, the ghoulish Broadway tune "Some Folks," cocaine-bumping hard rocker "Gold Digger" and, of course, "Dead in the Water/The Black Widow" with its Incoherent morose lyrics by none other than Vincent Price! The legacy of songs dealing with the Stephen character directly, "From Agony" ("Stephen's") "The Awakening," is among the most underrated and implacably chilling pieces of horror music fiction ever recorded. AM



## ALAN PARSONS PROJECT

*Tales of Mystery and Imagination*  
Edgar Allan Poe (1976)  
20th Century Fox

While the horror story set to music is a staple of heavy metal (King Diamond comes to mind), finding such space for a musical anthology of short tales is less common, and selling such material in

the world of AM radio-friendly pop rock never still. Yet in the late '70s, Alan Parsons Project defied with an album devoted to interpreting the work of a genre master in the form of baroque, accessible "progressive" soft rock and the light classical that was popular at the time. That it broke into the Top 40 charts for both album and single ("The Systems of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" reissues it at the most ground-breaking. GP



## GOBLIN

*Suspense (1977)*  
Globe/RS

Suspense is arguably Dario Argento's masterpiece, but it's remembered today just as much for the score composed by Italian prog rock band Goblin as it is for the director's striking use of colors

and hyper-stylized dramatic violence. The movie "Suspect" theme is easily one of the most recognized horror compositions. An eerie fourteen-note heeded melody driven by synthesizer and backed up by baroque strings, the track functions as a dark and creepy soundtrack to Argento's surreal narrative. Other tracks such as "Witch" and "Markos" boast more prog-rock weirdness, combining swirling synths, crashing timpani drums and fiberoptic bass to fuel the film's chaos. It was a bold move using synths and prog rock in the late '70s when movies still typically employed orchestral arrangements. The unconventional music became the perfect match for Argento's visuals and ultimately influenced an entire wave of electronic horror scores, not the least of which was John Carpenter's *Halloween*. **AWL**



## THE CRAMPS

*Songs the Lord Taught Us* (1986)  
Village Records

Released in 1980, *Songs the Lord Taught Us* is a slinky swirl of surf music, punk rock and radioability. It blazes together to spawn a new genre: psychobilly. The Cramps' first album is crisscrossed with lurid guitar licks from Poison Ivy and Bryna Gray, tribal drums courtesy of Nick Knox, and the di-

sonated vocals of lead singer Lux Interior, the maddest child of them all. Boasting baroque and brilliant covers of '50s and '60s tunes, the originals on the album are out of the world, adorning apocalyptic themes, homicidal maniacs, mayanish women, undead clowns, gorilla and the ghoulish cult of lycanthropy. Though The Cramps would continue to thrive for several more decades, coming only when Interior died in 2009, *S&T* remains a watershed moment in music. It slanted lowdown trash into high art, forever affirming The Cramps' legendary status in horror pop culture. **LLM**



The Damned

## THE DAMNED

*The Black Album* (1986)  
Glenview

The Damned had flirted with gothic imagery since their 1978 origins — singer Dave Vanian was a former gravedigger who dressed like a vampire — but with 1983's *The Black Album*, they further embraced their devilish nature, dopping a

wipe-on-wash lookbook with the band's name on it on the cover. Tracks like "Lucky Star" and "Sick of This and That" displayed a mordant sense of punk humor, but the spooky side of The Damned's sound had now expanded to incorporate film noir soundtracks ("Twisted Movie"), soliloquies on serials ("Theory") and philosophical pondering (the apocalyptic opus "Carbon Dioxide"). Horror film fans could also swoon to the gothic album of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" and "13th Floor Witches," the latter a love letter to Dr. Phibes himself. A legendary achievement in punk, goth and everything in between, *The Black Album* still circles the globe in equal measure. **LLM**

Rocky Erickson and The Aliens



## ROKY ERICKSON AND THE ALIENS

*The Evil One* (1983)  
415 Records

Austin's Roger "Roky" Erickson is considered one of the godfathers of American garage rock for his work with The 13th Floor Elevators during the mid-'60s. However, most horror fans will likely remember the 1981 monstrosity when classless the first time they fell in love with Roky's music: This debut record with his second group The Aliens solidified Erickson as a truly original voice in the world of wild, froaky and psychedelic hard rock. "Night of the Vampires," "Bloody Woman," "It's A Cold Night for Aliens" and the incredible "Seed for the Fire Demon" are all must-hear classics of creepy, atmospheric rock, with lyrics ripped straight from the pages of *Weird Tales*, *Cosplay* and *Earth* magazines. Of course, it's all delivered with Roky's incredible vocals, choral and uniquely off-kilter chime. This is one record you need to hear. **GP**



## SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

*JuJu* (1987)  
Polygram

By their fourth album, Siouxsie and the Banshees had mastered the art of creating sonic spells, with Juju evoking a witchy, subliminal complete with the scent of frankincense and amulet-making. Songs such as "Spellbound," "African Nights,"

"Halloween" and "Wooden Doll" are iconic in the Siouxsie canon, while the slow creep of "Into the Light" and "Night Shift" make them equally essential tracks. Released in 1987, Juju continued to influence decades of not only black-die goths but music fans of all stripes, thanks to Siouxsie's powerful, otherworldly vocals and guitar work from the frighteningly talented John McGehee, not to mention Badde's heart-shredding drums and Steve Severin's thunderous bass riffs. Juju is a horror album that transcends time and genre. **LLM**



## THE METEORS

*In Heaven* (1981)  
Lost Soul Records

Psychobilly comes in many guises: from Screaming Lord Sutch and Howlin' Atkins, and, of course, Johnny Cash coined the term in his country novelty "One Piece at a Time," but The Meteors were the definitive band in the genre with *In Heaven*

as the blueprint: With standout tracks "The Cobra," "Death Dance," "Maniac" and "Into the Darkness," *In Heaven* combined raucous, radioably rhythmic and punk frenzy with horror topics, a signature style that would light the lives of psycho veterans Devo and the B-52s, Mötley Crüe, Tiger Army and countless others. The album injected enough fright, beauty and danger to inspire a state two-rockabilly movement, creating an equally new mutant offspring. **JS**



## VENOM

*Black Metal* (1982)  
Nektar

When the New Wave of British Heavy Metal went mainstream in the early '80s, Venom remained dangerous with its second album, 1982's *Black Metal*. Proudly satanic, musically rough around the edges in the punk tradition and screaming like a basement demo, it took metal's love affair with the Devil to the next level.

—along with the 1981 debut *Whitcomb: In Hell*. It was *Black Metal*, however, that marked misanthropy's most extreme subgenre. Although its style is an early form of thrash, the album's evil aesthetic and lyrical content helped inspire Norwegian metalheads to don corpse paint and write soundtracks to church burnings. Plus, "Columbus Birthday," "The Wicked Hour" and the title track have been covered by Grail of Fith, Deena Borik, Mayhem, Slayer and Macabre, revealing the disc's ongoing influence. A 2002 re-release features nine additional tracks on an album made for head-banging and horn-blowing. **DA**

## HALLOWEEN

### JOHN CARPENTER

*Halloween (1978)*

Various Soundboards

Never mind the signature chronology, never mind James Lee Curtis, there's a bigger reason why *Halloween* remains a time-honored classic. John Carpenter's moody, minimalist soundtrack. No other score is as synonymous with the horror genre as *Halloween*, particularly its main theme, a SH best masterpiece that immediately conjures up images of wailing leaves and jack-o'-lanterns burning in the night. Inspired by Golan's *Suspense*, Carpenter's composition is consistently more atmospheric and low-fi sounding, yet its mood and chilling tone cannot be matched. Throughout the 1980s, keyboards and synths would fuel many a cheap slasher, and today films such as the *Matrix* remake and *J. Edgar* are using a more round-trip route back to Carpenter's legacy. No matter what medium you're looking at, the *Halloween* soundtrack is one of the horror genre's defining works. **AWL**

### ALIEN SEX FIEND

*And Soth (1994)*

Anagram

By 1994, Alien Sex Fiend was becoming synonymous with an unholy conglomeration of musical styles, their torturous eventually roasting forward to such bands such as Ministry and Marilyn Manson. Influenced by 8-miles, comic books, school culture and various flesh substances, *And Soth* features HN Fiend's reaction working to kataris, loopy effect, as Mr. Fiend's pop-check-to synth work worms its way into the listener's brain. Using pleasurable puns and pre-attacked song titles to satirize real-life zombies, shower religion and savor at the class system, the album keeps things light, even making shock therapy sound like fun. And Soth's opening track "In God We Trust (In Cars We Rust)" firmly established a nihilist ethos for the ages. "Sticks and stones may break your bones / But names will never hurt us." **LLM**

### SAMHAIN

*Initium (1994)*

Plan 9

Named with the Latin word for "beginning," *Initium* signaled a new start for Glenn Danzig after the Misfits' demise, moving away from pop look-alike movie ransack towards a darker preoccupation with old world horrors. The change in

course is established in the album's opening moments with Danzig howling a devil incantation over a swirling dirge of noise, before leaping into poppy hardcore song "Samhain." The hilarious splatterpunk of "All Murder, All Gods, All Fun" dips into the cartoon violence of his former band, as does "Horror Bo," a new arrangement of the Misfits track, but the rest of the album focuses on evil, gothic imagery in songs such as "The Howl" and

"No Who Could Be Nicer." *Initium's* variation in style, from hardcore to punk and garb makes the album difficult to categorize. It's a completely unique example of occult rock and an essential cornerstone of the Danzig legacy. **AWL**

## MISFITS

### Legacy of Shuddily (2010)

Plan 9

A compilation of tracks from 1978 to '87 (including many from the later-released *Slater Age* sessions) but issued as its only album in 1995, *Legacy of Shuddily* was for many years the first glimpse into the early work of the godfathers of horrorpunk. Though *Flash of the Angelus* was recorded before the band embraced its trademark ghoulie appearance and morbid movie lyrics, as seen as Glenn Danzig belts "If you're gonna scream, scream with me..." as "Hyped Moments," you just know this is a group destined for gothicized post-punk. The ghastly goods pop up in small doses throughout the album, until the two discs, the All-Misfits anthems "Halloween" and "American Nightmen" (a tale of a guy who just crashed an axe through his girl's head, done in perfect Elks style), pack more of the macabre into two short songs than most dark acts do in a career. For legends of creature of the night, this album is a 4.5.

## SKINNY PUPPY

*Stink (1992)*

Network

Skippy Puppy's effect on horror music is immeasurable. The Vancouver-based outfit's 1995 full-length release *Stink* delivers an ingenious, frequently scary synthesis of stark sounds, dance beats and sinister samples from horror movie classics, including *The Legend of Hell House* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, plus *Atanarjuat* Mark's infamous question "Is it safe?" Featuring Nick Digne's ghastly growls, Skinny Puppy pushed industrial as far into winnow pores, that a new category was created to describe their, electro-industrial. Tim Elford of *Sonnet* Heats produced "Assimilate," the band's most famous track, which sounds like an '80s horror score well before four soundtracks came into vogue, while songs such as "Dead Lines" and "Bismillah" are both creepy and catchy. Skinny Puppy's influence is still clearly felt across the industrial landscape (including Nine Inch Nails), the group's music an incompensable style that's somehow danceable while sounding like a serial killer's nightmare. **LLM**

### SLAYER

*Reign in Blood (1988)*

Def Jam

Slayer had already built a reputation for face-scratching extreme metal, but so was pre-empted for 1986's *Reign in Blood*, the 29-minute thrash metal masterpiece that forever changed aggressive music. Then-top producer Rick Rubin basically dropped in to sharpen up the muddy production, allowing for the incomparable screams, blurring guitar technicality, bludgeoning and anarchy down like to low listeners' carotid artery while causing an instant adrenaline rush. While much can be said of *Reign in Blood's* musical influence, especially plating truth to death metal, it's also the band's all its most lyrically prescient, with tales of total torture ("Angel of Death"), black magic ("Reborn") and carnival gore ("Pierce Me Pierce"). Closing track "Raining Blood," about a lost soul overthrowing Heaven, famously opens

with the sound of falling rain, depicting one of the creepiest images in metal. *Reign in Blood* might be the best metal album of all time, and it is also one of the most disturbing. **AW**



## KING DIAMOND

**Abigail (1987)**  
RCA/Atlantic

The King's first concept album and second solo record after the dissolution of Mercyful Fate, 1987's *Abigail* tells the story of Jonathan LeMay and Miriam McKim, a young couple that inherits an old mansion populated by the family ghost, who becomes Jonathan's life sentence plot of his dark and demonic child, Abigail, to possess Miriam, perpetuating a sinister family curse. Of course, the curse comes to fruition. Filled with thrills, ill omens, loads of chilling imagery and tragedy, *Abigail* is a fantastic example of gothic horror storytelling done through operatic, intensely comic heavy metal. It went on to influence pretty much every black/death/thrash/metal/power metal band that showed any interest in the macabre, let alone horrific storytelling as opposed to just screaming about Satan for an hour. **JS**



WENDY G. WILLIAMS



## PLASMATICS

**Maggot Farm (1987)**  
Profile

Released in 1987, is a Plasmatics reunion album of sorts, after the brief solo career of always provocative singer Wendy G. Williams. *Maggot Farm* moved the Plasmatics away from its first punk rock into a world of carnal, nihilistic heavy metal with doomsday images. *Maggot Farm* tells of a future in which the carelessness of humans has caused prehistoric places to skyrocket, making the world in an apocalyptic of giant mutant maggots. Tied through a mixture of sordid, graphic narrated pieces and thrashy songs such as "You're a Zombi" and "Brain Dead," it serves as a heavy metal mass of sex, a perfect companion piece for '80s sludge fields such as *Shred Trash and Glass of Nails*. Ten High! It's mandatory listening for all horror-loving punks, thrashers and transients. **JS**



## BLUE OYSTER CULT

**Imaginos (1980)**  
Columbia

*Imaginos* may have been a commercial disaster for the legendary Blue Oyster Cult when it was released, but time has allowed for some serious reconsideration of this album. Lyrically inspired by horror and science fiction literature, in particular the works of H.P. Lovecraft, much of the material out of *Imaginos* features the heaviest riffing and most scuffed melodies of the band's career, not to mention studio appearances by such big names as shredder Joe Satriani and Doors guitarist Robby Krieger. Whether it's the album's epic title track, the anthemic "Blue Oyster Cult" or an excellent reworking of the early 80s classic "Astronomy," *Imaginos* is a creepy career highlight. **GP**



## DANZIG

**Danzig (1988)**  
Def American

When post-Gothman Danzig emerged in 1988, it was a kick in the pants to the conservative Reagan decade — one that took devil music back to its bluesy roots. But "Eli Dile" wasn't crouching about fearing Satan, he was screaming being in league with him. From the sinister opening ticks and howl of "Heist of Cain," to the closing lyrics "want you, need you" like on "Eli Dile," Danzig is all about appetite — for sex, blood and sin. Under the direction of producer Rick Rubin, those themes look home perfectly in the band's biggest hit, "Mother" (the video for which was banned by MTV because it features a bloodied woman on a sacrificial altar). Simple, aggressive and sinister, Danzig signaled a dangerous new aesthetic in dark music. **DA**



## GWAR

**The Wretched and the Divine (1993)**  
Metal Blade Records

If you've seen GWAR live you know all about the group's elaborate costumes and props, used to perform chaotic, violent and sexual acts on stage. There's no other outfit quite like it (though several imitators), and no horror act is complete without an entry from these interplanetary warriors. Soundstage of the Universe is the band's masterpiece, a concept album about depicting a bloody rampage on Earth. Blood, guts, juvenile pervisions, R.P. Lovecraft and virgins delivered with enough nasty riffs and solos to feed the thrasher in you self-licking with slime. How does it get any better than that? R.I.P. Original AM



## CARCASS

**Reinventing the Meathead (1991)**  
Earache

After the unrelenting, gore-fueled churn of their first two albums, Carcass added a second guitarist and turned its lyrical focus from an utter splatfest to a sly blend of '80s horror-comedy that functions as an overview of ways to dispose of human bodies, including making them to get food ("Pedophile Bakery"), fertilizer ("Inpropagation") and even glue to be pulled ("Inconceivable Sockwork Abuse"). What made the band truly one of a kind on *Reinventing*, though, was its incorporation of early sinuous leads and spine-chilling melodies with brutal riffs and words, a morbidly tongue-in-cheek making of the gore-punk genre they'd inadvertently created with death metal, irreverently raising the bar for both to a level yet to be matched. **GT**



## SCREAMING LORD SUTCH

**Screaming Lord Sutch and the Savages (1969)**  
EMI

From "Jack the Ripper" to "Dracula's Daughter" to "She's Fallen in Love With the Werewolf," Screaming Lord Sutch was the king of '60s horror rock in his native UK. This anthology, the first authorized collection of his spooky singles that date back as far as 1963, offers a primer blast of British garage rock with a macabre horror approach, working in sexual innuendo and references to actual murders. Often drenched out in makeup and an understated hat, Sutch and his band of ghastly guitar-wingers provided a bridge between the early novelty horror hits and the Alice Cooper shock rock of the '70s. **BP**





## WHITE ZOMBIE

*La Sexorcisto: Devil Music Vol. 1 (1992)*

Deftone

With its bed-mat-obsessed, cartoonishly satirical groove-metal, *Blasphemously* adorned with choice samples pulled from old TV shows, exploitation and horror flicks, *La Sexorcisto: Devil Music Vol. 1* introduced the mainstream to the psycho-sexual world of Rob Zombie and his band of unweaned, latter-day Manson Family members. Largely remembered for the monster hit "Thriller 90," White Zombie's 1992 Deftone debut combines some of the best material of Zombie's career, thanks to the molasses-thick guitar/bass pairing of J. Vengor and Sean Astuit, as well as Ivan DePrante's thunderous skin-beating. Highlighted by Rob Zombie's Ed-Ruth-trick-or-treating-on-halloweeners-style art and a killer spoken word intro by Iggy Pop in the track "Black Sunshine," *La Sexorcisto* dropped the world into a hell that was super sexy, swinging fun. **B+**



## CANNIBAL CORPSE

*The Bleeding (1994)*

Metal Blade

Cannibal Corpse was already an underground sensation when it released *The Bleeding* in 1994, but it would be this fourth LP that would break down some serious commercial doors for one of death metal's most iconic and formative acts. The album showcased a marked improvement in both production and songwriting for Cannibal Corpse, so it combined the savagely guttural and intense nature of its early work with more-drip musicianship, tight arrangements and controlled, catchy riffs, all stamped in on "Sinking Through the Eyes of the Dead," "Slipped, Raped and Strangled" and the eponymous title track. The band would continue to court controversy, however, as the album's critical and commercial success drew more attention to the extreme lyrical content. Love or hate CC, there's no denying *The Bleeding's* position as one of death metal's most horrific offerings. **B+**



## DEADBOLT

*Shrunken Head (1994)*

Cargo/Hoodlambert

The 1994 full-length debut from San Diego's Deadbolt plays like a 1960 party held in a cemetery. The band's instantly recognizable mix of novelty-distorted surf guitar, rockabilly attitude, cavernous, gothic vocals and black humor

remixed "vocally" was oriented and perfected here, and has changed little in the ensuing decades. "How Don't Know Me" is cryptic and foreboding, while "Voodoo Doll," "Down in the Lab" and the title track are the essence of creepy and weird, but the album's highlight is a tale of madness and terror titled "Mark Wilson Stares the Earth," which details the insanity of encountering a man thought to be very dead. The self-proclaimed "Scariest Band in the World," Deadbolt fashioned a world with *Shrunken Head* that is both eerie and (with disclaimers at the postal service and other annoyances) darkly comedic. **B+**



## GRAVEDIGGAZ

*6 Feet Deep (1994)*

See Street/Island/Polygram Records

Profile hip-hop producer RZA is one of the most distinguished artists in the scene — his work with the Wu-Tang Clan will hold relevance forever,

Looking in his film scores for *Ghost Dog*, *Blade* and *Millions*, it's no surprise that he's also credited as the granddaddy of horrorcore, a subgenre of rap heavily reliant on a "cinematic" knowledge of horror and exploitation films. Gravediggaz was his first real, a sequel, but the group's debut, *6 Feet Deep*, is widely regarded as the first full-on horror-themed hip-hop record. The arrangements deliver on a level of suspense that takes you from the cemetery right into a haunted house, but both still in the middle of the "road." This record is a gem by one of the most exceptional beat makers in the game and certainly worth a listen for all hip-hop heads. **A-**



## BROTHA LYNCH HUNG

*Season of the Scorpion (1994)*

Black Market Records

Most of us are disappointed these days, but in the 1990s, things were different. With negative attention from parents' worried of heavy metal in the '90s, rappers needed new ways to shock.

Brotha Lynch Hung's *Season of the Scorpion* was the record to do that, sparking a movement of hardcore rappers that celebrated as much Detroit stories and celebrated a deep fascination with horror movies — Scorpion was now Leatherface and rappers from Gabbie played Melvin. *SoS* is probably the most crucial record in the advancement of horrorcore lyrically, and marked the debut of the most consistent rapper in the genre. **A-**



## MARILYN MANSON

*Smells Like Children (1995)*

Nothing/Manic Street Preachers

Marilyn Manson is a courted controversy even before this LP-length EP's 1995 release, so a couple of its more salacious samples were replaced with sound bites considered less offensive. By Nothing Records' strict rules, even

with those changes, *Smells Like Children* contains a link, a barbaric vision of corrupted innocence. Featuring several inspired covers — the high-chirping cover of The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper (The World of Paul McCartney)" among them — the original on *Smells Like Children* are just as creepy and compelling. Through songs such as "Diary of a Mad Band," "Kissin' Under" and "Dance of the Bape Hula," the EP shows the listener into a haunted house of drugs and debauchery and looks the door, laughing maniacally at its captive audience. It was an early salvo in Manson's plans for world domination through divinity and decadence, and it sounds just as wickedly wonderful now as it did back then. **B+**





## NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS

*Molar Melodrama (1990)*

Mute Records

This seemingly arcane pairing first adorns the cover of Nick Cave's ninth studio album serves as an ironic counterpart to the songs therein, which are filled with such an abundance of mad-as-as-madness and nihilism that the Devil himself would be loathe not to turn along. The album begins with the baroque title of "Million-Quadrant Machine With Disruptive Noisefield Theory," thus christening us through a regale's gallery of Seltzer-bellied sociats, dagger-hungry ex-lovers and Prozac-popping teenage girls with a penchant for child murder. Cave's sullen opus climaxes with a fifteen-minute epic in which a misanthropic loner systematically dispatches the denizens of a neighborhood pub with glacial acolyte — and it's not enough, the album ends with a coyly selected Bob Dylan cover, which suggests that death is perhaps not the end. **A-**



## MISFITS

*American Psycho (1997)*

Capitol

American Psycho had some pretty big shoes to fill for Misfits' last back in 1997, namely those of vocalist and songwriter Glenn Danzig, who dissolved the band at the early '80s to move onto other projects. With expectations set fairly high, the response at the time was predictably divided between old school fans who wouldn't accept anything neo-Danzig and those willing to keep an open mind about the future. Regardless of fan fervor, American Psycho is a burst of creativity thanks to bright production, heavier songwriting and the charismatic vocals and presence of lead singer Michael Davies. It's also gone on to influence countless horror punk bands, largely deriving the genre. Horror punk as we know it simply would not exist without this album. **B+**



## TYPE O NEGATIVE

*October Rush (1999)*

Reprise

This third full-length from Brooklyn's Dark Four stripped away the dense metal and raging hardcore influences of earlier albums, instead crafting a polished, depressing and spooky work of mainstream gothic rock full of lush keyboards, pretty, Range-y guitar licks and bits of loss, death, sex and perked wolverines. Yes, the track "Wolf Moon" is a crispy, perfect-for-Halloween tune about a man turning into a werewolf any time he goes down on a menstruating woman, while "Hunted" is an ode to a succubus and the perfect album closer. For those separatist types with the twisted path song of the 1980s, "Love You To Death," and an absolutely nutcracker cover of Neil Young's "Garden of Eatin'." And you have a record that practically bleeds orange and black. While Slow, Deep and Hard was a scathing, satirical howl of hatred and self-loathing and Sleazy Kneave sold more, October Rush's mix of humor, horror and sadness is Type O Negative at its dark, cohesive best. **B-**



## GROOVIE GHOULIES

*Be-Animated on Festival (1997)*

Lookout Records

While the original Misfits were known for shock, decidedly anti-PC lyrics, the Groovie Ghoulies always operated on the opposite end of the horror pop punk spectrum with sugar-coated, kid-friendly songs about monsters and Halloween fun (Franklin Kipl Ghoulie once recorded a children's album). Attesting the spelling of the 1970s animated genre of the same name, the Ghoulies played a three-chord Rickenbacker sound that also drew influences from Village Halloween records, garage rock and bubblegum pop. Be-Animated Festival is the band's fourth album, which brought with it more widespread attention. It's an "unseasoned pink ride of teenage monster romance songs ("Graveyard Girlfriend"), nods to legendary cryptids ("Chupacabra"), and even a, well, ghoulain tribute to Elvis ("Graceland"). If Be-Animated Festival isn't the Groovie Ghoulies' best collection of minorist mash-ups, it's still a solid place to start digging. **B-**



## CRUCIALLY AND THE BEAST

*Crucially and the Beast (1994)*

Mayhem

Hannu Hämmer played a big part conceptually on the gate-crashing third full-length from Berlin's incredibly influential gothic black metalers Crucially and the Beast. The band's music had always possessed an atmosphere of decadence, yet it was Crucially and the Beast that brought the group mainstream attention, thanks to its electric balance of melodic black metal and a dramatic sense of style, all tied together with that post-punk scream of frontman Dael Fifth. Legendary Hammer gleason queen Iggy Pop even makes an appearance on the album, exploding her iconic role as vampire murderer Elizabeth Bathory with a spoken word section in the epic "Bathory Aria." Quirky, subversive and over-the-top, Crucially and the Beast is a fine example of where it all came together for Dael and his band of metal merchants. **B+**



## GHASTLY ONES

*A-Hunting We Will Go-Go (1999)*

Zomba A Go-Go Records

Fusing an affection for creature features, old Lu-chi Love licks, Halloween and early '60s surf music, California's Ghastly Ones unleashed a singularly spooky surf rock sound to the world with the debut A-Hunting We Will Go-Go. Released in 1999 as Rob Zombie's Zombie A Go-Go imprint, this record was a love letter to creepy things old and borrowed, but to Zombie fans unfamiliar with the concept of horror surf rock, it was something completely new. With reverb-soaked Dick Dale and Del-Arena inspired odds to ghoulain fly in the form of "Spookedancer," "Luscious Underbaker" and "Nail'd Inside," this genre-melting palette enthralled legions of Halloween, horror and surf enthusiasts, and served as a gateway into the worlds of psychobilly, Madman Kulture and even horrorpunk for many young ghosts. **B-**



## ROB ZOMBIE

*Hellbilly Deluxe (2006)*

Gothic

After the collapse of his racist, nihil and ink-splattered grindhouse groove-music powerhouse White Zombie, Rob Zombie blew past expectations with the critically acclaimed, multi-platinum-selling Hellbilly Deluxe. Every track oozes apocalyptic

fan from Tarantino-inspired "Dimeyula" to the spectral soundscapes in "Halloween Part 1: Return of the Phantom Strangler." With its creepy, Shark Moon-voiced intro, catchy, industrial rock ode to ghouls, ghosts, clowns and monsters, and a *Famous Monsters*-worthy cover joined by the incomparable Basil Gogos, Hellbilly Deluxe wasn't just the biggest horror-rock record of the '00s, it also marked the arrival of an Alito Cooper for the new generation. **B+**



## JOHNNY CASH

*Murder (2000)*

*American Recordings*

Like the Bible he so adored, country music legend Johnny Cash was laid in black, preached the word of God, and had no shortage of murder tales to relate. Whether sinful pride ("The Sound of Laughter," "Don't Take Your Game to Town"), drug addiction ("Cocaine Blues") or pure psychopathy ("Delia's Gone," "Folsom Prison Blues") is to blame, humanity creates the more believably terrifying monster than any of the demonic or undead on this compilation of grave hits. "The Long Black Veil" bears the only stamp of the supernatural, but when a melody can transcend by hipsters and good ol' boys alike, stories unflinchingly into humanity's heart of darkness—that's an essential horror album. **B+**



## THE INDEPENDENTS

*Back From the Grave (2007)*

*Independents Records*

In the early '80s, before the Mad Max reformed without denting and horror punk was over a thing, two dudes from South Carolina came up with this weird idea: a ski-punk cult inspired by Elvis Presley and horror. The even weirder part is that

it worked, so much so that The Independents caught the attention of Jody Neumaier, who immediately offered to manage the band until his death in 2001. Neumaier's final contribution was producing *Back From the Grave*, the ultimate statement from one of horror punk's last offerings. Here are eight rare live takes of murders and murder most foul driven by smooth "ska rock" or rill and good-time ska-punk, a songwriting style comparable to the indie. The Independents continue to soldier on today, touring non-stop and pumping out releases when they can, but *Back From the Grave* is their most talked-about album and the one that still makes up the bulk of the set list. **A-1**



## GHOSTTOWN

*Give 'Em More Rope (2002)*

*Agony Planet Records*

From long in the black hunt of Texas, Ghosttown is the quintessential western-themed horror rock band, cooking up a Southern-blend mix of country, punk and metal, while spinning trappings, little of unspoken clues in an enthralling outlaw landscape. Give 'Em More Rope is their horrid, full-on, fast-moving classic, with "Horns of the Living Dead" paying homage to George A. Romero, "Fetters of Demons" weaving a wicked tale of revenge, and "Red Unit Dink" laying down a shi-riding about desert black magic. Some folks call Ghosttown "potentially"—if you want to see what the hellfire of the Texas heat would do to a morose, black makeup-wearing kid, Give 'Em More Rope is your answer. **A-1**



## HEXENTANZ

*Hexentanz (2004)*

*The Possid Dungeon*

Witchcraft and the occult have been recurring themes throughout heavy metal, goth and psychedelic rock, but in 2004 a mysterious collective known as Hexentanz (meaning "witches dance") offered a whole new way to experience the dark arts through music. With *Hexentanz*, an album functioning as a soundtrack to a medieval witch's sabbat. Drenched in hypnotic tribal drums, actual period instruments including human bones, ghostly distant choirs and arcane chants taken from authentic occult practices, the album conjures up cinematic images from films such as *Alaska (1992)*. Hexentanz exists within a corner of awe, it's the only set to take this approach to music. As a result, *Hexentanz* is one of the most bone-chilling explorations of evil and black magic ever recorded. **A-1**



## ZOMBI

*Cosmos (2004)*

*Reprise*

Hillsburg, Pennsylvania, spawned one of the rawest voices in the world of creeped-out, instrumental progressive music in the form of Zombi, a duo whose members—drummer AE Peters and Steve Moore on bass and synth—happened to worship heavily at the altar of John Carpenter and Fabio Frizzi early in their careers. *Cosmos* showcases these influences, this full-length debut stands like it would be at home on an Italian horror soundtrack or slasher-slasher flick from the early '80s. Moore's disastrous fireworks on the bass wails perfectly with his mood-setting synth playing, while Peters' propulsive drumming drives each track, providing a pace that is simultaneously retro warm and modern-day cool. Zombi continues to blow minds but it was *Cosmos* that set them on their path to the stars. **B+**



## MAD SIN

*Dead Man's Calling (2005)*

*"I Used to Fuck People Like You in Prison"*

*Records*

Psychobilly's stepchild with horror is as straightforward as the genre's musical formula. On *Dead Man's Calling*, Germany's Mad Sin expanded on both those aspects, and the result was one of the most electrifying and rocking horror records ever. Singing in slices of pop punk, old school hardcore and rockabilly influences, *Dead Man's*

Drinking is a non-stop party in a psychobilly package flavoured with a grimy wit and peppered with puns, spooky theatrics and guest appearances by Lars Frederiksen of Pearl Jam and P.O.D. Day of HorrorFest. Vocalist Kaelin DeVille's raucous, inventive lyrics go beyond the usual B-movie monsters to hit original tales inspired by real-life tapes, notably Jack the Ripper ("To Walk the Night"), fake scorecards ("Plastic Monsters") and bad love ("Controlled Separation"). Mad Sin has a decade-thick catalogue of horror belabors, if you have yet to check them out, David Moore's Catalogue is the place to start. **AVL**



## MIDNIGHT SYNDICATE

*Out of the Darkness (2006)*  
Gritty Productions

There's a reason this dad's sinister music continues to be played at haunted attractions, Halloween shows and home theatre everywhere. One listen to *Out of the Darkness*, a collection of their most memorable musical moments from earlier releases but re-recorded in 2006, and you'll know why. The far-banging, -bombers, gothic atmosphere and apocalyptic, top-of-the-world, pop-porn and apocalyptic choir on songs such as "Sanctuary," "Forbidden Crypts" and "Solomon Retribution" conjure images of mist-shrouded cemeteries, crumbling castles, mansions shrouded by ghosts and fields of jack-o'-lanterns. Given how extended they've become with the very feeling of the holiday, Halloween would just not be right without Midnight Syndicate. **JS**



## DAX RIGGS

*We Sing of Gaily Blood or Love (2009)*  
Wax Passions

Dax Riggs has kept things dark and marbled through various bands, including the sludge-metal outfit Acid Bath and the acoustic-driven blues rock outfit Deadboy & The Elephantmen. But when he started recording garage blues under his own name in 2007 with *We Sing of Gaily Blood or Love*, he unlocked something more fearful and sinister. Ghosts, demons, the Devil, death and literal darkness (on songs such as "Night as the Nation," "The Terrors of Nightshade" and "Truth in the Dark") are the foreboding cloaking and bring their way through heavy blues riffs and tormented vocals, which tremble with the perversity of a madman's confessional. Riggs reveals themes that stretch back to before Robert

Johnson with an allusion about old school, evil in mind, body and soul. "It is also 'demons tied to a chair in my brain,'" he laments on the eponymous track, while in "Secrets of Hutton Nor-Hall" he confirms, "Not this shadow in my shadow / Not this darkness in my blues." *We Sing of Gaily Blood or Love* is a thoroughly best of midnight creature that pumps new blood into old Scratch. **DA**



## DEAD MAN'S BONES

*Dead Man's Bones (2009)*

ANTI-

You might think a band featuring Gravediggaz' school headliners Papa Roach could call Dead Man's Bones would be an embarrassing failure, but you'd be wrong. Goats' deep, mooring vocals are perfect for lyrics such as "So look all the windows and doors / This devil's coming for you and yours." The music on this self-titled album is haunting and heartfelt, and feels like it was conjured in the biblical backwoods of decades past. With the help of the Silverlake Conservatory Children's Choir, which provides creepy-yet-charming harmonies, Goats and bandmate Zach Shedd descend into hells of dark heart, with resonant, sweeping ballads steeped in gothic imagery, zombies, werewolves, ghost ships, velvety banes, shadowy ghosts and graveyards draped with flowers. With songs this eerie and obsessive, Goats could have a successful mass career, if that whole yelling and decaying thing doesn't work out. **LLM**



## GHOST

*Dons Esquirores (2010)*

How Above Metal Blade Records

With their arcane ceremonial robes, satanic Papa rooster Papa Emeritus' ghostly corpse-painted face and mist-shrouded live sets, you'd be forgiven if you expected Sweden's Ghost to be belting out typical black metal biddens. However, the band's groove is more like Blue Oyster Cult or Black Sabbath than Emperor or Immortal. Their debut, *Dons Esquirores*, is an uniquely haunting metal album, highly accessible with layered harmonies and a catchy pop sensibility, but still soaked in huge amounts of doom and gloom. While you float through the tranquil atmosphere that is Ghost, you don't even realize you're right in the middle of a Luciferian mass. The band has become increasingly popular since this debut, offering a blend of dark music that's over the top and tongue-in-cheek, and has single-handedly revitalized the occult rock subgenre. **AM**



## THE HAXAN CLOAK

*The Haxan Cloak (2012)*

Tri Angle

The self-titled first album by The Haxan Cloak — a.k.a. British DJ Bobby Krlic — is about dying, but as dark and disturbing a trip through the electronic soundscape it is, the follow-up about what happens after you're dead is the surreal equivalent of screaming in fear. *Excavation* opens with a deep, churning bassline (you can feel it in your pants), then gives way to distorted wails, processed industrial noises and other pulsating experimental sounds (sometimes played backwards), which create a journey of draining despair, surreal mystery and utter loneliness. Krlic recently scored Michael Mann's thriller *Blackhat*, but *Excavation* feels like the soundtrack for a horror film that could shatter your soul. Few ambient albums are able to take such an emotional and physical toll on the listener. **DA**

MIL  
CANTHORNE

OLYIA  
TSENG

M  
PORTLAND

ADELAIDE  
KANE

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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER DIRECTING HIS LAST  
AND LARGEST BUDGET FILM, ROGER CORMAN  
REFLECTS ON *FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND* AND A  
CAREER IN CREATURE FEATURES

# THE MONSTER MAKES THE MAN

MICHAEL DOYLE

**N**EARLY TWO HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE PUBLICATION OF HER AMARANTHINE NOVEL, MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* HAS PROVED AS RESOLUTELY INDESTRUCTIBLE AS HER MONSTER.

Ever since the first one-act 18th-century adaptation was made by the Edition Company and director J. Gault Bradley in 1910, there have been numerous interpretations, sequels, spin-offs and reboots that feature the Doberman barker and his unholy progeny. These efforts range from the obscure (The Ode of Frankenstein, 1935) and the parodic (Young Frankenstein, 1974) to the downright respectable (Anne Marie: Mary Frankenstein's Daughter, 1986).

In 1990, at a time when most studios on the mad scientist genre were thought to be well rehearsed, Roger Corman was about to give life to his own contribution to Frankenstein film lore. Twenty years after helming the high-kicking historical drama *Viva Valchiria* and *Thelma*, the sports movie maker was enticed back to the director's chair by producer Thom Mount (then the head of Universal) to make a new *Frankenstein* movie. Initially reluctant to sign on due to "the countless number of adaptations already made in the first ninety years of cinema,"



**Making Monster Movies:** Rory Cooney (left) on an on with actor John Hart, who plays Dr. Joseph Buchanan

Cooney looked close to bring *Frankenstein* DeLund, Brian Aldiss' renowned novel of time-traveling terror, to the screen. Although this choice prompted some to label *The King of Gull's* return to directing as something of a "reconversion" itself, he simply viewed it more as an opportunity to deliver a bracing, high-concept tale on an overly-familiar story.

Adapted by Cooney and film critic F.R. Leavy, *Frankenstein* DeLund began in the year 2021. Dr. Joseph Buchanan (New Line Academy Award-nominee John Hurt), a reclusive living and working in New Los Angeles, has created his enigmatic weapon that replicates everything its destructive, particle beam is aimed at. Capable of harnessing the power of a black hole, it soon becomes apparent that the device has inadvertently created an unstable rift in time and space. As Buchanan leaves the leading facility and heads for home, he and his unseen-powered being are locked into the film's wide wasteland and deposited near Lake Geneva, Switzerland, in May 1817. Entering a winter, too, Buchanan is seduced to encounter Dr. Victor Frankenstein (Ben Barnes), a brilliant scientist whose wild experiments have yet to become the subject of notoriety.

Buchanan learns that Victor's young brother has recently been executed and a killer girl, Justine (Sophie Cookson, the director's daughter), stands accused of the crime. Buchanan is not content of Justine's guilt and his suspicions are confirmed when he sees Victor conducting a house and powerful monster (Nick Simble) in his forest. Afterward, Justine's trial, Buchanan meets Mary Shelley (Dagmar Fink), a beautiful eighteen-year-old girl who is set to take the name Shelley and write her literary chef-d'oeuvre. Despite Buchanan's best efforts to save Justine, the monster continues to wreak monstrous havoc in an effort to compel Victor to make a mate for it. In desperation, the creature brutally slaughters Victor's family. Elizabeth (Catherine Rabett, finding

his to-mid Buchanan's swelling help in restoring his deceased lover's broken body to life—with devastating results.

Filed on a seven-week shooting schedule at a cost of \$11.5 million (although Cooney insists the figure was actually closer to \$6 million), *Frankenstein* DeLund was still the highest budgeted in-house picture had ever worked with. Despite being filmed in the gorgeous Italian region of Bellagio, Como and Lombardy at the primary use of cinematographer Armando Nannuzzi (who had previously worked with Vittorio De Sica and Luciano Ercoli), and featuring some impressive monster FX by Nick Buchanan, this probing philosophical treat on the perils of the Frankenstein impulse was only awarded a color release by 20th Century Fox. DeLund by critics to "confusing" and "quaint," the film is in fact a steady and surprisingly delicate arthouse that remains Cooney's role climbing credit of the last 45 years.

On the 20th anniversary of his aesthetic monster epics, *Blue Marlin* invited the living legend to volunteer his thoughts on an array of subjects including life, death, the ethics of science, and his on- and off-camera inseparable inseparability to cinema.

#### HOW DID THE FILM ADAPTATION OF FRANKENSTEIN DE LUND COME TO LIFE?

I started, well, early enough, having nothing to do with Brian Aldiss' novel. Universal had done some market research and came to the conclusion that a picture called *Rory Cooney's Frankenstein* would be very successful. They called me and asked if I'd like to make it and I said, "No." I felt it would just be the 10th or 11th *Frankenstein* movie and would be lost in the long history of *Frankenstein* pictures. I really didn't agree with their research but they kept calling me about every six months for a couple of years and, frankly, kept making the amount of money they were offering me! [Chuckling] Finally, I said, "Well, this story has been treated so many different ways, if I can find something that is new and original I'll

do it." I then did a little research of my own and came across a review somewhere of Brian's novel. Upon reading it, I realized that this was the new version I'd been looking for, so it took the mythic properties of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and played with them in a unique way. It was a science fiction tale-told story and a classic horror story. So I agreed to make the movie and we did *Frankenstein* DeLund in that style.

#### DID YOU CHANGE MUCH FROM ALDISS' NOVEL?

No. I followed Brian's novel very closely because I thought it was brilliant. I made only one significant change and that was in the profession of the protagonist, Buchanan. In the novel he was originally a diplomat and maybe it's the fact that I studied physics in college and was very much interested in science and the history of science, but I thought it would be interesting if Buchanan was instead a scientist and was capable for the time-wise having occurred. I felt that would add an intriguing note of complexity—it's a scientist from the 21st century was transported back in time and lost to encounter with a 19th-century scientist in the form of Dr. Frankenstein. I felt this would allow us to draw some fascinating parallels between these characters and their approaches to scientific research.

#### FRANKENSTEIN UNBORN SAUCES TWENTY YEARS SINCE YOUR LAST CREATORIAL OFFERING, 1975'S *THE EIGHTH DAY* AND *BROWN, WHITE & A LONG GOLF*?

*The Eight Day* and *Brown* was the only time in my directing career—I don't want to call it that—when I really got fired during shooting. I generally began every film I made with great energy and enthusiasm, but would start to get a little worn out as time went on. Despite that, the enthusiasm would always carry me through. But in *The Eight Day* and *Brown*, which I shot in Ireland, I realized that I'd directed nearly 60 films in just fourteen or fifteen years and I was utterly exhausted. Every day I wanted to go back home to America and this discontent was something I'd never really experienced before. My original intention was to finish the film and take a one-year sabbatical before coming back to directing. I felt my career up to that point had been too much, too quickly, but then what happened was I got bored. So I started a little production/distribution company, New World Pictures, and the company suddenly took off. I thought I would turn it over to my brother, [John], to run with a sales manager, but he wasn't much interested and the sales manager couldn't really run it himself. The whole thing became such an incredible success, I then said, "Okay, I'll run it for a year." Naturally, you can understand what happened next: one year led into another year, and then another, and after a period of time had elapsed I just thought that the years had passed me by and I would just watch a product. Of course, then *Frankenstein* DeLund came up and changed all that.

#### DID YOU ADMIT THE TIME YOU SPENT AWAY FROM DIRECTING?



OH, CHI-ICK! ABBOTT AND COSTELLO FACE OFF  
AGAINST FRANKENSTEIN AND OTHER CLASSIC  
MONSTERS IN A NEW DVD SET

# LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE GRAVEYARD

PAUL  
CORUPE

**B**rave AP to Hammer all the way up to recond directors such as Francis Ford Coppola, Roger Corman and Joe Johnston, Universal dragged their famed fright scores back into the spotlight for a series of comedy efforts with stars Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. *Dracula*, Frankenstein's monster, the Mummy, the Wolf Man, the Invisible Man and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde all got to mix it up with the popular comedy duo in a series of films that, in many cases, represented the last appearance of Universal's iteration of that monster. Though available in past DVD sets, the four-movie run has finally been reunited on *Abbott and Costello Meet the Monsters*, a new collection from Universal.

**B**ud Lugosi and Lon Chaney Jr. reprise their iconic roles as Dracula and the Wolf Man in this colorized horror comedy classic that kicked off the pair's monster encounters. They star as delivery men who drop off the remains of Frankenstein's monster (Glenn Strange) and Dracula at a haunted house attraction, only to discover the creatures aren't so dead after all. Our heroes must spring into action when full moon-phobic Lawrence Talbot flaps in to warn them that Drac is planning an escape unchained the big ghouls monster as he swings arm above. Horror comedies don't get much better than this—the creepy atmosphere is thick and the running jokes in which Costello's character is shocked speechless, unable to gasp out a scream, has got to run its course.

**B** Vincent Price has a cameo at the end of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* as the voice of the Invisible Man, but this lackluster follow-up has Arthur Franz as the transparent look-alike. Of all the films on the set, *Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man* borrows the least from the horror

genre, instead using the film's set-up to get Costello in the boxing ring as "Louie the Loner," who has the Invisible Man secretly delivering knock-out blows. When dangerous gangsters demand Louie throw a fight, his peer-through partner refuses, putting the guys in a precarious position. While the jokes in this installment are better than the later films, it's more a straight comedy than anything else.

**B** Though Boris Karloff declined to reprise his role as Frankenstein's monster in the first film, he appears in this effort in a choice role—or two, depending on how you look at it. With seemingly fewer jokes than the other films, this entry is a period piece with Abbott and Costello playing disgraced cops trying to get back on the force by capturing a murderer on the loose, little do they know it's Dr. Jekyll (Karloff), who injects a serum that turns him into his old brute Mr. Hyde. This one gets by with shadowy gas-in London streets and a great performance from Karloff—with time-lapse transformations, this is as much his picture as the lighter comedy duo, even though Costello's character ends up getting his Hyde on too.

**B** This final Meet movie is still a fun ride, and chockablock of creepy Egyptian tombs and Cairo alleys that have higher production values than most of Universal's cave-mummy sagas. Bud and Lou are back to dust off some ancient puns as they come into the possession of a cursed medallion that indicates the location of treasure guarded by the living mummy Kharis (rather than the franchise's Kharis). A cult loved or is after the precious artifact, as are some local treasure seekers, which culminates in a goofy climax with these mummies (are a disguised Abbott) running around a crypt. It's a decent finish to the series, which concluded just as Hammer was about to breathe new life into the characters with 1957's *The Curse of Frankenstein*.





FROM  
LEFT  
FRANKEN-  
STEIN

Made of Science: Victor Frankenstein (John Hurt) creates his fiend, Justine (Christine Ebersole), and right: Schaefer and his scientist crew

I've thought about that a lot and I still haven't come to any real decision. I remember that as a distributor, we distributed low-budget American independent films — most of which we made ourselves, but some we picked up. Then I started distributing European art films and one of these was a film by Federico Fellini (*Amarcord*). Fellini once told me, "Roger, forget about distributing and go back to directing!" But I thought too much time had gone by and I'd made this commitment, over the years I've often wondered what would have happened if I'd followed his original plan and taken just one year off and then come back.

**THE CASTING OF JOHN HURT AS FRANKENSTEIN AND RALPH FIENNES AS VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN WAS INSPIRED. HOW DID THEY BECOME INVOLVED WITH THE PROJECT?**

It was a formal casting procedure, actually. John Hurt and Ralph Fiennes were not big movie stars who commanded giant salaries, but they still received a fair amount of money. I'd always felt that John was a brilliant actor who was always teetering on the edge of stardom. That has been John's whole career. He's kind of a star — not because he's been a handsome leading man but simply due to the fact he is an outstanding and intelligent actor. I felt that John could bring the intelligence and sensitivity to playing Frankenstein as a rational and humane scientific mind, whereas I felt Ralph — although he was Puerto Rican — would control perfectly as the more passionate Frankenstein. I thought Ralph was the right choice in making a character that is both possessing and blindly fearless in what he is attempting to do.

**HOW CLOSELY DID YOU WORK WITH MIKE BAILEY IN DEVELOPING HIS PERFORMANCE AS THE MONSTER?**

I worked reasonably closely with Nick — well, when we were casting the Monster, we early the best actor in my bright category — but when collaborating with actors my technique as a director is not to be telling them, "Pick up that coffee cup on the table," it's more concerned with my discussing the

role with them in advance so that we are both in agreement on the basic thrust of the character. I then leave a lot up to them during shooting. I've seldom had problems with actors, but I believe that when problems do occur between a director and an actor it's almost always over the interpretation of a character. As long as the actor and I are on the same page as it were in regards to the interpretation, I give them considerable freedom and just offer suggestions on the set. It's my duty to respectfully help them, not dictate to them.

**IT'S TEMPTING TO THINK WHAT YOUR OLD FRIEND BOB KEATLEY WOULD HAVE MADE OF FRANKENSTEIN'S INTERPRETATION OF THE ROLE. DO YOU THINK HE WOULD HAVE LIKED IT?**

Yes, I do. Of course, Bob played the Frankenstein Monster quite differently to Nick, but had Bob been younger I might very well have gone for the idea of casting him in that part. You know, it's interesting, but I've never really thought about that until just now when you asked me that question.

**LET'S SPECULATE ON WHO YOU WOULD HAVE CAST AS FRANKENSTEIN AND FRANKENSTEIN. DID YOU MIND FRANKENSTEIN'S INQUIRY AT THE AGE OF YOUR AMPHIBIOUS YEARS: I CAN SEE VICENT PRICE AS FRANKENSTEIN AND POSSIBLY JACK NICOLSON AS FRANKENSTEIN.**

Yes and yes! [Laughs] Actually, I would have to jump years because of the difference between them but — assuming they were both a little closer in age — Jack as Schaefer and Vincent as Frankenstein would have been great.

**I ENJOYED THE RETURN OF THE LITERAL, SHIMMERING DREAM SEQUENCES YOU DID IN THE KISS OF DEATH AND THE MAGES OF THE RED SEAT. DO YOU PREFER NEW FRANKENSTEIN BEING A CONTINUATION OF THOSE**

**EARLIER HORROR FILMS?**

Not a continuation exactly, but there is a reference within *Frankenstein Unbound* and it does contain certain elements that have indeed been copied from one film — or a bundle of films — to the other.

**ONE NOTICEABLE THING ABOUT THE MOVIE IS ITS VIOLENCE: HEADS ARE DECAPITATED, ARMS TEAR FROM SOCKETS AND HEARTS POP OUT OF CHESTS. WAS THAT A COMMERCIAL CONSIDERATION ON YOUR PART AS THE ADAPTOR FILM HAS BECOME FAN MORE EXPLOIT SINCE THE DAYS OF YOUR FOX CIRCLE?**

It was to a certain extent. I was aware that the approach I'd taken in some of my earlier horror films was focused on trying to imply the horror rather than show moments of explicit horror. I always thought of it as a game in some ways that allowed you to appreciate the mood and use it as one of the tools that inspire horror without having to depict any bloody violence. To me, that was something a director could do in playing with his craft. But, yes, I was certainly conscious that the craft itself had become blander in the intervening years and there is some concession in that fact in the film.

**ASTH FRANKENSTEIN AND BUCHANAN HAVE CREATED DESTRUCTIVE MONSTERS: FRANKENSTEIN WITH THE LITERAL MONSTER AND BUCHANAN WITH HIS LASER WEAPON THAT INADVERTENTLY CREATED THE TIME-MPT. ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, DO YOU FEEL PERSONALLY ABOUT THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY SCENARISTS HAVE TO HUMANITY?**

Oh, very much so. In fact, my life may or may not have been saved by the atom bomb, which is, of course, very controversial. When I wasn't seen lately I was in a Navy Officer training program and we knew that we were being prepared for one thing — the planned invasion of Japan. We also knew that BUDJUG — the Bureau of Naval Personnel — had



extended there would be something like a million casualties on this question so Japan was an armed island. And it occurred, it would have probably been the bloodiest invasion in military history and with such a high casualty rate we knew that a large proportion of us were going to die. Therefore, the whole responsibility of scientists in creating the atom bomb—which was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing a lot of people and bringing about Japan's surrender—possibly saved my life and my friends' lives. That thought has been in my mind ever since and was the main reason why I changed Kushner's occupation from a scientist to a scientist. I wanted to directly address the responsibilities scientists have.

**FRANKENSTEIN DECLARES, "I AM A SCIENTIST, I CANNOT SIN." AS OBVIOUSLY FEELS THAT PROGRESS SHOULD NOT BE HALTED AT THE EXPENSE OF RESENTMENT, BUT WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR FILM IS IN ANY WAY ANTI-SCIENCE OR ANTI-PROGRESS?**

No, I wouldn't say that. I would say that within the film is a debate about science and morality as to whether Frankenstein's statement is true or not. I consciously tried to present both sides of the equation and let the audience decide for themselves.

**COULD IT NOT BE ARGUED THAT FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND IS A DEEPLY CONSERVATIVE FILM IN THE SENSE IN WHICH IT NOT ONLY CONTRASTS THE TRAVELED FUTURE WITH THE ROMANTIC PAST, BUT REVEALS THAT OUR WORLDING WAS SOMEBODY INVENTED HISTORY?**

Well, the picture does follow the somewhat reactionary thinking that there are things that remain as perhaps not aware to investigate or understand, but I wanted that sort to be just one half of it. I mean, that was the basic thrust of *Frankenstein* depicted in the way it provides a philosophical discussion. By taking Brian's protagonist and making him a scientist, my thinking was, "Okay, he will become something of new idea." It's still Brian's world but we're added—how about?—say this—an additional level of advocacy to his theories and ideas, and how they can be interpreted.

**ONE OF THE IMAGINATIONS OF YOUR FILM IS AVOIDING FRANKENSTEIN AS A MONSTER OUT OF THE ARMS OF HIS DECEASED LOVER—A CONCEPT THAT WAS REVIVED IN 1994 BY KENNETH BRANHAM IN MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN.**

Yes, but that was not my idea. That came directly from the novel and I also thought it was an extremely good reference to Mary Shelley's story and characters. I actually liked *Frankenstein* film very much, by the way. I thought it was good.

**AT ONE POINT FRANKENSTEIN ASSERTS THAT A SOUL IS "A WEAKER CRYSTAL FOR MEN OTHER THAN YOU AND I, ROCHAMBAULT." DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF THE HUMAN SOUL?**



*Two Of A Kind: The Monster (Nick Dambit) is rejected, and kept Buchanan meets Mary Shelley (Amy Adams)*

**Me [Laughs]** A simple, straightforward answer.

**ARE YOU AFRAID OF DEATH?**

Again, as I think of it, I'm as a chemical and physical process as opposed to a spiritual one. I think that when life and consciousness ends, it's very much like when you snuff out the burning flame of a candle—that's all I see that either glows but I'm now 46 years old, so a certain amount of thought has gone into that statement over a considerable period of time. I follow the teachings of a little bit of the existentialists of the 1940s and '50s and I believe it was [Albert] Camus who once said—and I'm not certain of this exact quote to permit me to give you the basic idea of it. "In a universe that, as far as we know, has no meaning, the absurd man gives a meaning arbitrarily to his life and then lives according to that meaning." I think that is the best we can do.

**THE EVIL OF FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND WAS BEEN ATTACKED FOR BEING "CONFUSING." NOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THAT?**

Well, if that criticism has been made it is probably because I was imperfect in my interpretation—because to me the ending is not imperfect. But it's been so long since we made the picture—exactly 25 years ago—that I don't recall all of my thought processes in regard to the climax. I can say that it was intended to suggest that the concept of sci-

ence—and indeed the concept of the Frankenstein Monster itself—was still with us at our species and our knowledge continues to move forward. It may be that I was probably not as expert as I could have been in portraying that idea.

**WAS JOHN HART'S BRIEF EXPOSITIONARY NARRATION, AS WE SEE ROCHAMBAULT GET OFF FOR HIS CLAMOROUS CONFESSION INTO THE MONSTER, A POST-PRODUCTION AFTERTHOUGHT?**

I don't think so. I believe that narration was included in the script.

**HOW MUCH CONTROL DID YOU HAVE OVER THE FILM IN TERMS OF THE FINAL CUT?**

I pretty much had control. I do recall there was a screening arranged at [Twentieth Century] Fox that did not go well. I wasn't aware that the executives were going to be seeing the film. I thought we were just screening *Frankenstein Unbound* for somebody, but there were a lot more people there than I'd anticipated. Afterwards, some criticisms were made and some cuts were forced upon me. But I want stress that the film is still basically my cut. I can't say that anybody damaged the picture. Some cuts didn't totally agree with me, in general, it was my cut.

**WAS IT VIOLENCE BEING EXERCISED?**

No, it was individual moments that certain people



*Controlled Chaos: Stone directs as Hart looks on, and behind the scenes grab business*

disappointed with it as a result of that, the picture becomes a little bit less of a horror film than I originally intended. In fact, some of the executives felt they didn't want *Poseidon* debased to be that much of a horror film. I was more or less trying to combine serious things, I wanted it to be a thoughtful and serious film about science, about humanity, and at the same time make it a horror movie. It may be that, ultimately, I didn't blend those elements together as successfully as perhaps I could have done.

#### AND YOU SAYING THAT YOU WERE BUSY AFTER A TWENTY-YEAR ABSENCE FROM DIRECTING?

Well, that thought did actually occur to me before I started directing the film. I did wonder what it was going to be like when I not foot on a set again as a director after all these years had gone by. I remember thinking about that when we started work on the very first sequence we shot, which was in a town square in northern Italy. I've forgotten the name of it now but it was an old town square that was doubling as 19th-century Switzerland. When we started shooting, it immediately felt like no time had passed whatsoever. I was there with my script in my hand and was standing behind the camera and talking to actors — just as I had done twenty years earlier. I suddenly laughed to myself and thought, "Why was I so nervous?"

#### YOUR FANS WERE ASKING THAT TRANKENSTEIN UNBROKE WOULD INFLUENTIATE THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF NEW FILMS FROM YOU AS DIRECTOR, NOT THAT'S

#### NEVER HAPPENED, WHY?

I think the years have finally caught up with me. I've thought several times of directing again, but I feel at my age, slightly younger guys should probably be doing the directing and I'll happily continue producing.

#### WERE YOU EVER INTERESTED IN ADAPTING RYAN ALEXANDER'S 1991 NOVEL, *ORACULA UNBOUND*?

Actually, the funny thing is I did think about doing that novel at one time. I remember reading *Oracula Unbound* and thinking it was very good and would make a nice duo with *Poseidon Unbound* — it was put the two movies together. Unfortunately, I was not entirely pleased with my experience as *Poseidon Unbound*. The production was not run as well as it could have been and I thought that some of the American screenwriters felt superior to their Italian counterparts. Personally, I got along better with the Italians who were very good at their jobs. I thought *Oracula Unbound* turned out to be a good film, but I wasn't as happy with it as I might have been. If I'd perhaps read it a little bit more, maybe I would have made *Oracula Unbound*.

#### BE HONEST, WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT TO YOU, MONETARY SUCCESS OR ARTISTIC SUCCESS?

(stretches) You know, I've never been asked that question before, exactly!

#### WHY?

No, and I wouldn't answer it exactly. I'd instead answer a similar question. I don't want to make this sound too pretentious — oh, what the hell, I'll make it a little bit more so. I think it's a little

pretentious. I think we live in a somewhat compromised society and, to a certain extent, neither pictures reflect that compromise in that it is both an art and a business. A writer or painter or composer can sit down and simply create something on their own. But a film director or producer or screenwriter can't make a movie all by themselves. This means that cinema automatically becomes some portion of a business because you need a crew and your efforts are then the product of a team. Having been at various stages of my career as writer, director and producer, I consider the director to generally be the key creative driving force — but I think it contributes greatly to the making of a film. Therefore, it's important to consider the fact that you have to get your money back in order to make the next film and continue working. So I think this situation means that movies are an unavoidable compromise of art and business.

#### YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO CINEMA ARE IMMENSE — IF ONLY FOR LAUNCHING THE STELLAR CAREERS OF COPPOLA, SCORSESE, DEMME, GABTE, CAMERON AND OTHERS — BUT DO YOU SEE ANY OF THE FILMS THAT YOU'VE MADE AS BEING IMPORTANT?

Not really. I think that today — what's the word I'm looking for? (Pauses) I'd select the word "irrelevant." I would say my pictures are interesting rather than important in that they reflect something of me and my time. This is what I think right now, at this moment, but I might see a different word to describe those if you asked me that same question tomorrow. During the 1980s — particularly with pictures like *The Wild Angels* and *The Top*, and maybe even a little earlier with *The Idolater* — there was used a certain sociological and cultural meaning ascribed to them.

#### ON THAT BASIS, DO YOU BELIEVE THAT CINEMA HAS THE POWER TO LITERALLY CHANGE LIVES?

No, not directly. I don't think any art form is that powerful. I think cinema can certainly influence things somewhat and, again, can move the social and cultural scale slightly — which is a good thing. But I don't believe we as filmmakers should think of ourselves as having the power to affect direct change. That is not the function of art. However, one of the many functions of art is to exert a small degree of influence.

#### WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE, WHAT HAS GIVEN YOU THE GREATEST SATISFACTION IN YOUR UNBROKEN CAREER?

I'd say it's personal satisfaction in my having been a writer, director and producer at various times. Generally, as a director, when I felt I'd done good work, I still never thought that any of my pictures were perfect. In fact, I don't believe there is any such thing as perfection in the arts. I don't consider myself to be an artist, more of a craftsman. It occasionally some work of craft might approach being a work of art, that's fine. There's a bonus. But I think my greatest satisfaction has been when I've felt I have worked well as a craftsman. That's always been good enough for me. ☺



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Slimey's Best

## ANGUISH (USA)

SUNNY MALLIN



ANGUISH

Anguish confronts the issue of teenage mental illness using possession as a metaphor for schizophrenia. The first half of the film, a straight teen drama, boasts an unbearably authentic performance from Ryan Shapka (Survivance) as Tess. Quiet, lonely, comes of her skateboarding in the fog or leavens on the periphery of her new high school's clique, perfectly captures feelings of adolescent isolation and self-consciousness that act as a precursor to her break with reality. Unfortunately the film falters on originality and ambiguity in favor of point-by-point-too-scans and a silly secular exorcism finale. **AM**

## ANTI SOCIAL 2 (CANADA)

CODY CALAMAN



Anti Social (2013) took an interesting if not insane idea—what if social networking turned us into real zombies instead of virtual ones?—and rifled on the tags “zombies” of 20 Days Later. To its credit, Anti Social 2 expands the world of the original, but once again barely excels in intellectual pretensions. Fragment horror film (Michelle Nijck) sends the line searching for her stolen baby in a world where everyone is infected by the Social Reddium is kind of more evil Facebook, before being captured by a doctor working for the military. Co-writer/director

Only Siemaszko peaches from better films (Kasper's scary kid, Alexei's Neat, Madsen's body horror) without adding anything original to his oeuvre. Regardless, he sets us up for a sequel whether we want one or not. **SP**

## MY POSSESSIONS (CANADA)

JERODAN GALLAND



It's a question most horror movies avoid asking: what happens to a possessed person after the demon is driven from her or her body? In the case of the rather pitiable Ava (Joan Krause), she's having aggressive sexual charges, her lawyer gives her one out

Spent Possession. And yes, if she can prove she's no longer possessed, the court will drop all charges. But it soon becomes evident that the being who took over Ava isn't done with her. Writer/director Jordan Bellard wrings a number of dry chuckles out of his premise (“We never say the D-word,” Ava's counselor chides), and it's tempting to watch Ava piece together what happened during that month she was...away. Even if some of the character motivations seem contrived, it's still devilish good fun. **SP**

## BITE (CANADA)

CHAD ARCHIBALD

Optimal companion to be made between director Chad Archibald's Bite and David Cronenberg's The Fly, and for the most part, they were warranted. Siemaszko plays Casey, a bride-to-be who sed but who's bitten by something on a pre-wedding



tropical vacation with her BFFs. Back at home, Casey has to deal with a hostile mother-in-law, a fiancé who, unlike her, wants children and, more poignantly, the fact that she's turning into an insect. Gagnep's physical and mental transformation echoes Seth Brundle's in The Fly and it's awful to behold because we grow to empathize with her. The effects work is appropriately gooey, and while the film sometimes feels restricted by its budget, it's still an impressive, ambitious effort. **SP**

## THE BLUE HOUR (THAILAND)

ANICHA BOONYAWATANA



A haunting, poetic ghost story that only hints at the supernatural, the power and relevance of writer/director Anicha Boonyawatana's debut feature comes from its casual portrayal of posthumous sexuality, which happens to be between two boys, but isn't about being between two boys. The tension of the young lovers getting caught giving each other handies in an abandoned swimming pool complex is juxtaposed against the later experimental build-up, and it's not obvious which is the more intense element. That said, when the spooks aren't kicking more than good scum and shadow, the scenes we have to crane for (perhaps it's hard to make anything else horror work when nothing's in the closet anymore). **AM**

## BUMMY THE KILLER THING (FINLAND)

JOUHAN MALAKKINEN



When vice-looking French took over rural Finland for some proto-scientific debauchery, their perfect cross with a bit of British bad dudes, but that's the least of their problems. Also in the woods is a home-winter-come-ho-ho, a roadhouse-hybrid whose macabre secret is to put his screaming dick into anything resembling a vagina. While Bummy has all the makings of a midnight crowd-pleaser, the cross-hybrid mixes way more often than it hits. There's nothing wrong with a series of incoherent cross-outs, but in the wrong hands (as is the case here) it fails to entertain. **D**

## CHERRY TREE (IRELAND)

DAVID KEATING



Following their excellent claustrophobic *Moka* (2010), director David Keating and writer Brendan McCarthy return to the world of (literally) underground gouts with *Cherry Tree*. Here, an angel-fallen teenager named Faith (Maeve Horgan) is offered a chance to save her dying father by her mysterious field hockey coach, as long as she leaves the child of a demon. As with her previous effort, Keating's talents show brightest during the atmosphere-drenched ritual sequences. But despite its obvious strengths in creating memorable visuals and commanding a uniformly great cast, *Cherry Tree* falls victim to narrative laziness, local idiosyncrasies and a convoluted final punch that's out of place in an otherwise serious horror film. **D**

## CHUEL (FRANCE)

ERIC CHARRIERE



It would be disservice to describe crime novelist-turned-filmmaker Eric ChARRIERE's debut *Chuel* as a Gothic *Henry Potter* or a *Graveyard Book*, but it would largely be accurate. Jean-Jacques Laffé stars as Pierre, a seemingly ordinary man who spends

his days working menial temp jobs and caring for his disabled father. His evenings, however, are devoted to murder. Laffé plays Pierre as superficially charming but obviously tormented by his childhood. We don't pity Pierre or necessarily understand why he kills, he simply is what he is: a murderer with no remorse. *Chuel* is more drama than horror, and the killings mostly happen off-screen. In fact, ChARRIERE's portrait of a damaged mind is acutely touching as well as terrifying, and the ending is both devastating and poetic. **B**

## THE DARK BELOW (USA)

DOUGLAS SCHULZE



You have to hand it to director Douglas Schulze for even attempting a feature-length thriller with one line of dialogue and four credentialed (including *Hollywood* vet Martin Scorsese, *Gettysburg* of Al Pacino). The concept is klutzy: a woman is trapped under a frozen lake and must find the strength to survive, chasing gangs of air while her psychotic attacker stands guard and spaces her back into the icy water with scary results he gets. However, a concept, no matter how good, can't keep a movie afloat, and *The Dark Below* sinks under its bad science, clunky flashback sequences and underwhelming score. **D**

## DEADMAN INFERNO (JAPAN)

HIROSHI SHINAGAWA



*Deadman Inferno* is basically a low-budget Japanese version of the video game *Dead Island*. A washed-up Yakuza, a horny doctor, a pair of schoolyard martial artists, an aging cartoonist and a rapacious-loving, lesbianism turn up to battle the undead, which have taken over their island haven. Inventive, splatter-y deaths, raucous humor and a surprisingly emotional family subplot combine to deliver an intense ghostly revenge story set against zombies. **A-**

## DEATHMASH (NEW ZEALAND)

JASON LEI MOWDEN



Metalheads? Check. D&D Nerds? Check. Characterless, dense, cliché and dumber? Check! Throw on your juke jacket, finger a twenty-sided die and spin that record backwards because this is a definitely fun, '80s-inspired shout out to devil music and the splatter films of Peter Jackson informing the great heavy metal horror profiles of yesteryear, a group of outcasts form a band and accidentally play a demon-summoning riff that unleashes Hell on Earth. Ancient cults are belied, sex toys are wielded against hellspawn and blinding guitar solos are the only true defense! **A-**

## EXCESS FLESH (USA)

PATRICK KEMMELLY

Women's bodies are often put on display and sliced open in horror films, so why is it so unusual to have the horror reside in a woman's relationship with her body? *Excess*

# Melies and Magic

## GEORGES MELIÈS, THE FATHER OF FANTASTIQUE CINÉMA, WAS A MAGICIAN BEFORE BECOMING A FILMMAKER.

and he utilized his woodworker-esque ability to invent some of the first screen effects. In celebration of this, Philippe Spornell, director of *The Film Society* in Montreal, curated a spellbinding evening of early genre cinema, live music, 16mm projection, magic, metallurgy and even top dancing!



The festival's began with a showing of a new print of Georges Méliès's *The Great Moon* (1902), a tender 31-minute dopelumps on the silent-movie filmmaker starring Melies' son André in the titular role. How appropriate that the director who made one of the most exquisite horror films in the history of the genre (*Eyes Without a Face*) would be the introductory guide for this journey into the phantasmal and celastic world of Melies (pictured below).

Spornell then projected five 16mm prints of Melies films, including *Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *The Merry Phishes of Satan* (1906), with superb live musical accompaniment by Shayne Bryn on piano. The projection of the films was interspersed with performances by metallist and magician Vincent Pampore and his assistant Jessica Rose Alley. A thoroughly engaging evening, it appropriately positioned the development of early cinema in woodwork spectacle and artistry.

MAVAD DEGNOLD-BELLEMAIRE





Flash takes place in a single apartment, shared by two very different women: Jill (Ashley Giv) is the depressed shut-in who spends just as much time binge-eating as she does cooing at her attractive socié butterfly roommate Jennifer (Barry Lovelock). When Jill's mental state deteriorates even further, she expresses Jennifer in the apartment and violently abuses her. The film is as engaging as it is inflammatory, and it deserves your attention. **B+**

## GERMAN ANGST (GERMANY)

JORG BUTTIGHEIT,  
MICHAEL KISAKADZIO AND  
ANDREAS MARSHALL



German Angst avoids many of the shortcomings of the anthology film. There's no wince-inducing story. Instead, you jump right in to the first tale and confident atmosphere and quality until the segments. The first portion, "First Girl," sees a teenage girl finding her first guinea pigs, before introducing the man she has had up in the bedroom, as well as the horribly dark reasons he's there. Next, "Make a Wish" concerns housewife who find a dead couple for fun. The victims, however, have a hidden trick to escape the grip using some Old World magic. Finally, "Almau," unfolds like a tale in which an American photographer in Berlin goes too far when he's dubbed and discovers there's a price to pay for pleasure. Throughout German Angst, the imagery (most blades that read "Made in Germany") and themes make it clear the film is scraping some wounds the country is still trying to heal. Overall, it's one of the most consistent, dread-inducing anthology films in years. **B+**

## HE NEVER DIED (USA/CANADA)

JAYSON KRAWCEK



HE NEVER DIED

Hardcore hero Henry Rollins is Jack, a loner with a nihilistic past and a hunger for meat, presumably human blood. Is he a vampire, cannibal or war vet beyond the point of repair? When his "flesh" delivery hook-up runs about of some gangsters, Jack goes on an eye-killing spree that leaves a trail of buried-up bad guys. But after he loots his new slaughter, his humane side reluctantly emerges. Not ones to take an whipping lightly, the gangsters' ledger has got one less bar as

ball. But even *He Never Died's* success rests squarely on Rollins' built-up shoulders, as he delivers a furious, vulnerable and frenetic performance. Forge to director Jayson Krawceck for one hell of a ride, and one of our most highly recommended features of the fest. **B+**

## THE INTERIOR (CANADA)

TREVOR JURAS



Ad agency exec James (Patrick McElduff) decides to make a big change in his life when he receives some disconcerting news, so he embarks on a solo backpacking trip to try to make sense of it all. But what starts as an innocuous tale comedy unravels off into established horror territory halfway into the film — one minute James imagines he's taking off his demanding boss, the next he's running through the woods for his life. The shift is significant, but handled reasonably well, as James tries to hide deeper in the British Columbia interior to escape what at first seems like pranks by other campers. While *The Other Side of the Mountain* has set the bar high for camping-related chills, there's a sense of isolation, and some well-earned frights that make *The Interior* an interesting contender. **C+**

## JERUSALEM (ISRAEL)

DORON AND YONAH PIZ



In the Jewish faith, Yom Kippur is the day of atonement, when believers reflect on the year's sins and seek forgiveness from God. It's also the holiday during which Jerusalem takes place, only God seems to be absent and in his place is a demonic plague sweeping through the holy, conflict-ridden city. The brothers Piz have created a film with moral fiber, a palpable sense of panic and some wonderful gaudy footage that made Jerusalem's old city. Problematic is the purely expository dialogue, over-reliance on dead technology (Google Glass, anyone?) and repetitive monster scenes that shock at first but grow tedious. Entertaining, but just barely. **B-**

## JU-ON: THE FINAL CURSE (JAPAN)

MASAYUKI OGISHI

The third film in the reboot of Takashi Shimizu's original *Suicide* series is every bit as convulsing and absurd as you might expect. The details of the plot aren't exactly brilliant, but they do take a Jack seat to

# Small Gauge Trauma

**T**HIS YEAR, SMALL GAUGE TRAUMA PROGRAMMER MITCH DAVIS WOVE TOGETHER A SIGNATURE SELECTION OF EIGHT SHORT FILMS,

which move between beautiful puppet animation and visceral body horror, beginning with Ben Stiller's *The Stomach* (LQ), which presents a very unique premise: a restroom visit to communicate with people from beyond the grave through his stomach. The filmmaker creatively hybridizes the gritty British gangster film, body horror and the supernatural subgenres, and scenes that conjure up a macabre dreamworld.

In addition, Canadian animator Chris Walsh's *The Shattering* Mar is a sublime and haunting tale of a twisted man who takes pictures of terrible places. A meditation on the film genre, it's narrated by the iconic Barbara Steele (*Black Sunday*).

Then there's *Slit*, by Chien Gien (USA), a tightly directed dark comedy about the struggles of the personal here in the horror genre. The nerdy outsider. With touches of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, it presents the main character, a woman who attempts to change her nerdy image, with both sympathy and pathos.

The most interesting and challenging film of this year's programme, however, was *Heir*, by Canadian filmmaker Richard Powell. Part body horror, part H.P. Lovecraft, part beautiful B movie, the film is a reflection on the traumas of familial lineage, reminding audiences that the horror genre is at its best when it becomes an experience of the surreal (the surreal) over the sensible (the rational).

MARIO DEBRILLO-BELLEMAIRE





the fact that this is just a series of set-ups geared to have little ghost diets. Tushet and his rickety band Kojima appear out of this lot (or under a table, or as a shadow on the wall, or, in one instance, in a bowl of soup). Yes, soup. To say most of these films operate, well, in a lot of the soup and all of the other side the first series (and many other) is that they are designed to be funny.

**LADY PSYCHO KILLER (GAMMA)**

HATHMAN (IL FIVE)



Roughly as stupid as its title suggests, this Quebec-shot horror comedy (we can't count a mess of gender politics and serial killer clichés into something interesting, or even plausible Virginia college freshmen. The *Glitsch* book is

given in *Psyca* 181 assignment to transgress a "neutral norm" (see *above*). So, after we'd listed well to a strip club, she suddenly decides to become a mental killer for the erotic charge, and also because her absent father was one too. From wellfettered to seduced in a single afternoon, the coming-of-age tale isn't meant to be taken too seriously, but it's still a sedition, from cringe-worthy misadventure drama and embarrassing off-note performances to compulsively off-screen kills. *Michael Madsen*, *Ron Jeremy* and *David M. Boldt* are the respectable-only erotica victims, while *Michael Madsen* straddles credibly as a college professor. **PG**

LUIGI CIGNOLI

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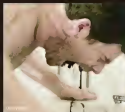


Pen and Babu have a problem: their dates Rex and Poyel are hungry, but they have nowhere to get food. You see, this handsome — young, dorkish and full of gum — lives in Kolkata, where presidential love is frowned upon. So they sneak into an air-conditioned room to drink and buck the night away; the couple approaches with a From there, the evening devolves into mindless, and the music devolves into history, despite the shrieks of our Gushing Mukherjee gang. Ludo is not, but once our protagonists leave the hungry strangers, it's part

## KIMA FOMBER OIKO

DEAN AND CHIEF OF STAFF

Rob (Glen Berry, a PhD student, hits at suicide following his girlfriend Alice's death in an accident. Regardless, his co-worker Nelly (Maggie Henderson) is drawn to him and the two start dating. Any little a couple has one for the first time there are bound to be surprises, but the biggest shocker for Rob and Nelly is New Class



Love, loneliness and acceptance are pruned along with the viscera in this touching and frankly surprising horror comedy. Deft storytelling and interesting characters make *Nine* far more than its creepy title. **B+**

## DIFFERENCE (AUSTIN, 1967)

JOSEPH W. SAMS, (FACADET)



across the steel and settles in for a long period of watching. Parker is adept at the task and seems to be a natural, at least until he starts to become emotionally attached to his target. The cabin slowly drifts away at Parker and as his emotional state deteriorates, the boat's remote structure goes with it. Discrepancy will generate comparisons to *Hydrospace* and *Defender's Squad Battle*, both of which are dejected commentaries. **B+**

## OFFICE (NORFOLK)

NORTH CHINA HYDRO



police interview his co-workers. Lovely Intern Lee Mi-Bye (Mi-sung Ko) seems the most shocked by the crimes, while her officemates are all wondering how this will affect their annual sales report and



**Insurer:** What's supposed to be a missing critique of the Korean situation will center over fairly loose all momentum after its exciting introduction, turning into an extraneously slow pace of cut and mass. **EC**

CLARK MUSEUM

G.I. "HUTY" BEASLY



**Tomara** (Gabriel Alkayed) has a terrible problem: His water supply in his Nigerian neighbourhood has been halted and now he's out of luck, so it's up to him to fix things. Though Oye gets a bit of a pass for being a *wannabe* hero, his belief that

a country without a strong international presence is horror cinema, there are certain elements are considered that are undesirable. From the extended toilet, jokes to the unnecessary dramatic sequences, the film feels more like something your middle-school friends would have made on the weekend than the real big bad from an ancient filmmaker. Repeat zombie actors and subpar practical effects almost make *Days* an abominable failure, but other than being gross of blood for hours, there's little to champion. **C-**

## SHREWS' NEST (SPAWN)

JAMARIE ANDRÉS AND ISTERAM ROEL



Agnes Obono, *Mother* (Macmillan), takes it to the limit of leaving her apartment, while her younger sister Nia (Made de Santiago) would like nothing more than a normal life full of friends and love. Their contrasting views on the potential threats that lie outside their door come to a head when upstairs neighbor Carlos (Jorge Lino) hits down the stairs and needs medical care. Carlos is shamed by Monica for her doffing and Nia for her beauty, but becomes suspicious when his stay keeps getting extended. As it turns out, Monica has a secret, dark past and their handsome house guest brings the memories she's been trying so hard to repress to the surface. *Shen's* West becomes delightfully relaxed and bloody as Monica begins to expose her personal demons. **C**



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LEGENDARY

GUILLERMO DEL TORO TAKES US INSIDE THE WORLD OF CRIMSON PEAK, EXPLAINING THAT HIS GOTHIC ROMANCE IS NOT ANOTHER GHOST MOVIE – OR EVEN A HAUNTED HOUSE FILM AT ALL

# Del Toro's Dark House

by DAVE KLEIN

**G**HOSTS ARE REAL. THIS MUCH I KNOW. THOSE FIRST LINES IN THE TRAILER FOR *CRIMSON PEAK* ARE A BIT MISLEADING, because although Guillermo del Toro's latest film features a covenious spooky mansion rife with floating apparitions, vaporous spirits and other spectral activities, it's not a haunted house movie.

"We have to be very careful not to confuse a haunted house movie with gothic romance," he explains in a phone interview leading up to the film's October 18 release (from Universal). "Gothic romance is very much a separate genre, that if you go in expecting pure romance, you're disappointed because there are a lot of dark and evil things in the tale. And if you go expecting a pure horror movie, you'll be disappointed because most of the time those things are spooky, atmospheric, occasionally scary – but they don't function as a horror film. So, *The Hunching of Mr. House of The* is not as much gothic romance as tales as haunted house stories. Even though Henry James modernized the concept by telling you the haunted house is really the protagonist's mind, that the ghosts may be all in her head, it's still a haunted house movie."

Central to gothic romance are decay, madness and death, which certainly shape the 19th-century world of *Crimson Peak*. Miss Wrenthorpe (Stoker, *Only Lovers Left Alive*) stars as Edith Cushing, an author who's desired by both her childhood friend Dr. Alan McMichael, played by Mia Wasikowska (del Toro's *Pacific Rim* and TV's *Sons of Anarchy*), and the enigmatic Dr. Thomas Sharpe, played by Tom Hiddleston (*The Avengers*).

*Only Lovers Left Alive*) After a family tragedy, she chooses to escape with Thomas, marrying him and moving to his family mansion in Cumberland, a mountainous region of northern England. A strange phenomenon that takes place in the area by the house gives the film its name.

"It's the top of a mountain, a peak that, when it snows, turns blood red because of the iron in the ground," says del Toro. "And it's basically a gothic title, because gothic films most of the time talk about a character or a place that is cursed. You know, it can be *Wuthering Heights*, it can be the name of a house. But it was a perfect title for a gothic romance. And it is used very symbolically in the movie to be in the crimson colour with the appearance of ghosts."

Edith shares her new home with not only Thomas, but his sister, Lady Lucille Sharpe (Jessica Chastain, *Texas Killing Fields*, *Adam* – which was co-produced by del Toro), whose jealousy over sharing her brother goes beyond normal sibling affection. The sensitive Sharpes want Edith to stay away from certain parts of the building, which she soon discovers has ghosts (del Toro regular Doug Jones is onboard to help bring the supernatural presence to life). Amidst the terrifying paranormal activity, Edith begins to uncover the horrible secrets of both the house and the Sharpe family.

The mansion, which was built on a soundstage in Toronto, is a lushly decrepit place full of secrets and mystery that looks every bit like the centerpiece of a haunted house movie, yet doesn't function in quite the same way.

"The main difference between a haunted house and a gothic romance [is] that in a haunted house, the house has a sentient quality, or has a



CRIMSON PEAK

by Guillermo del Toro

ment quality," discusses del Toro: "You know, *Her House* is presented very much as a sentient entity in [Shirley Jackson's] *The Hanging of Mr. X*. Or in *Her House*, by Richard Matheson. Or in many, many others, like *The Shining*, by Stephen King. In other words, the house is bad. And Stephen King has that saying, 'bad places attract bad characters' — that's the haunted house. The gothic romance, or the gothic romance's spirit, makes the house an entity that represents but has no sentient qualities. It represents a home for the evil acts, and very much embodies the decay of a character, but has no sentient qualities. The house is not evil *per se*, it just is."

Although the house isn't a "trap" to punish the film's characters, it's still charged with symbolism, such as the red water that runs through its creaky pages. It's "a house that breathes, bleeds... and remembers," as the movie tells us, and del Toro considers it one of his greatest cinematic art pieces.

"The house very much is represented in the movie as a decaying, rotting entity," he says. "Very much like the two main antagonists. It's ancient and steeped in decaying luxury and is almost like a cat in the middle of a landscape."

The filmmaker was — as is almost all of his works — very hands-on in the design of the location. There's a beautiful but menacing mechanical motif, which is carried through to the movie's poster art; as in many del Toro movies, it features a library room and fantastic toys and automobiles, and the color scheme is a timeless mix of cool blues with reds and gold.

"I think that the duty of the director is to be completely in control of the visual elements and the oral elements of a movie," asserts del Toro, who pointed the tale with Matthew Robitons (Minnic, *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*). "You listen to a piece of music, a piece of sound design, or you watch a colour scheme, or a texture scheme, or the harmony between wardrobe, production design and cinematography. It needs to fall under the director's watchful eye, because I always say that 50 percent of a narrative of a film is in the visuals and in the sound, and I call that jokingly 'eye protein' instead of 'eye candy.' And I think that *Crimson* is a perfect example of a movie that tells you the story through the visuals as much as it would through the screenplay."

Having made movies about vampires, restless bags, sorrowful ghosts, heroic demons, mythological creatures and *Katji* monsters, *Crimson Peak* represents a corner of the Del Toroverse that hasn't been explored yet. For the look of it, the filmmaker drew upon not only his personal long-held obsessions, but also films from both the haunted house and gothic romance subgenres.

"There's a little bit of *Dracula* [1931], there's a little bit of *The Changeling* [1930]," he allows. "I think the design of the house



In *Crimson*: Jessica Chastain as Lady Lucille Sharp, (top) Lily Collins (the Washburn) is comforted by Sir Thomas Sharp (Tom Hiddleston), and (opposite) Edith Washburn (the Washburn) is comforted by Sir Thomas Sharp (Tom Hiddleston), and (opposite) Edith Washburn (the Washburn) is comforted by Sir Thomas Sharp (Tom Hiddleston).

## CRIMSON IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A MOVIE THAT TELLS YOU THE STORY THROUGH THE VISUALS AS MUCH AS IT WOULD THROUGH THE SCREENPLAY.

— Guillermo del Toro

is really all an homage to the classic takes on classic romances like *Abbezzo* [1943], *Wuthering Heights* [1936] or *Dracula* — things like that... It's very much a classic version of a gothic tale, and it shows commercialism. There's a very open homage to *Dracula* in a line of dialogue, and there's an homage to *The Changeling* between the wheelchair and a red silk ball. But it stands on its own. It's very much its own creation."

Furthermore, although *Crimson Peak* is very much enmeshed in the (socially repressed) tradition of classic literature and cinema, del Toro wanted to modernize the sexualization of the protagonist. Stories in the gothic romance role — such as *Cornelia*, *Dracula* or *Wuthering Heights* — often punish their female leads for being sexual. Not so in *Crimson Peak*. In the film, Edith represents something unusual in both the gothic romance and in del Toro's canon.



**Coming For You** Dr. Alice McElaine (Sorvino, hovering) waits for withdrawal pills, and (top) consulting groups for who she lies in bed.

His films are full of strong female characters, however, unlike the pre-teen Otilia (Jara Roques) in *Rose's Labyrinth* or rebelist Susan Tyler (Mira Sorvino) in *Aliso*, he's bringing a protagonist to screen with a strong cerebral dimension to her.

"The gothic is a very female-oriented genre, and most of the time has very interesting female characters, but [then there's] the sexuality in them," he notes. "Rarely do gothic romances function without the heroine needing to be kept away from sexuality in order to remain pure

for the tale, and to survive. That's one of the things I wanted to break on Orson. The main character can have sex and still be strong, and still be able to survive and triumph or emerge alive and so forth. We didn't want to do the classical take of that. ... For me, the idea is to just have a character that is a little more modern than you normally get in a gothic romance—that is a character that has to go through the same paces that the gothic romance normally puts these through, but she resolves them in a different way than normal. So that was the

intention."

The theme of transformation has always played a huge part in del Toro's work. Whether it's physical, such as the original vampires in *Cronos*, *Blade II* and *The Strain*, or more psychological, such as the transition into adulthood experienced by Santi in *The Devil's Backbone* and Otilia in *Rose's Labyrinth*, his characters must endure the horrors of metamorphosis. It's here that *Orson* Peak is very connected to another old genre close to the filmmaker's heart.

"Gothic romances basically has a lot in common with fairy tales, in that they are riddles of passage for their protagonists," he says. "So these female characters are put through the paces, and in *Orson* Peak her stranger nature emerges little by little."

Del Toro's cinema is powerful because he's a filmmaker who not only combines, but also understands the interplay between his various genres and subgenres he's spent most of his 50 years exploring. He's been unlocking their spooky secrets like the rooms in an old mansion. As he points out, it's all thanks to his own rite of passage, formative years steeped in the dark and fantastic realms of fairy tales, ghost stories and even gothic romance—inspiring many other things, of course.

"As a kid I was informed by TV horror as much as cinema. And from books as much as cinema. So I was spooked by Rod Serling [The Twilight Zone] and I was spooked by M.R. James ["Whistle and I'll Come to You"]. And I was spooked by Sheldon La Puma [Carnegie]. And many of the great ghost writers of the past. But [laughs] I didn't have a nervous childhood."

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# HIGHWAYS HE TO LL

BY JAMES SCHMIDTKE  
AND DAVE ALEXANDER  
Introduction by  
JAMES SCHMIDTKE

**L**ONG BEFORE THE WALKING DEAD HIT SHELVER IN 2003, THERE WAS ANOTHER BLACK AND WHITE ZOMBIE TITLE THAT TORE A GORY SWATH THROUGH THE INDIE COMIC WORLD. When *Deadworld* launched in 1987 there was nothing even remotely like it: borrowing storylines, explicit drawings and bloodsoaked, painted covers made for a wild apocalyptic tapestry.

It begins with Mike and Don, two drug dealers with hearts of gold, their girlfriends Donna and Chris, a precocious kid named Joey and his big brother John (the "leader"). As they struggle to survive in a world where the dead have risen and prey on the living, they're relentlessly pursued by King Zombie Unlike *The Walking Dead's* rotters, *Deadworld* features sentient zombies, which lead the more traditional shamblers. King Zombie is an intelligent, scheming biker badass who literally wants to rule Hell on Earth. Despite whatever usual post-apocalypse obstacles *Deadworld's* crew of survivors whatever face, there was always the threat of whatever King Zombie had in store.

The comic was created by Stuart Klien (*The Reckless*, *Ed and Ralph*, *Edith*) (*The Reckless* for their Arrow Comics imprint, as a showcase for artist Vincent Locke, who would go on to fame for his work on *The Flash*, *Starman*, *A History of Violence* (the basis of the David Cronenberg film of the same name) and ultra-gory album covers for *Caribian* Corpse. Arrow published the first nine issues before closing shop. Locke then acquired the rights to *Deadworld* and Gary Reed picked it up, where it continued with his indie company, Collier Comics. As of issue #12, Reed became the main writer on the series, which continued until the first volume of the series ended at #26 in 1992. After a year, a second volume of *Deadworld* was launched that lasted another fifteen issues. After another lull, Image picked up the title in 2005 and brought in illustrator Collier Tatag (Deadpool), *The X-Men* for the third issue.

The last decade has seen various *Deadworld* releases, graphic novels and reissues with titles such as *Ed and Pecos*, *Sloughfarious*, *War of the Dead* and *Requiem* (in full colour), as well as T-shirts, collectors card series and, most recently, a line of socks/gap. The reissued Collier, which



originally shuttered in 2000 but returned in 2014, has put out several *Deadworld* titles so far this year alone. The Last Seeds, Frozen Deer and To All a King. In addition, Reed's *Deadworld* novel is forthcoming.

As the original zombie genre comic soldiers on, we tracked down Griffiths, Kent, Locke and Reed to talk about their wilking, talking, stinking dead

#### WHAT EVENTS LED UP TO THE CREATION OF DEADWORLD?

**Ralph Griffiths:** In the early '80s I renovated a bus station in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and sold comics there on a newsstand. Some old high school friends always hung around, and as we talked about comics, the idea bounced around to start up a bizco, aptly titled *Fantastik Avenue*. After a few issues and setting up at conventions we started recruiting a few other creators and artists who contributed to it. Once we saw *Teenage Abandon Alley* flourish on the shelves, we knew we had enough talent involved in our "zine" to try to launch *Answer Comics*. Funded by my magazine savings, and wanting to branch a number of books, we gathered our teams and set to work.

**Stuart Kent:** *Answer Comics'* first title, *Tales From the Afterlife*, was published in December of 1984. This was followed by *The Rebirth* and then the cult hit *Deadworld*. To do? I also have to note that *Deadworld* was created specifically for Verto. After we published a couple of his pieces in *Fantastik Avenue*, we knew we had to find a project for him.

**Vincent Locke:** I met Ralph and Stu at the first convention I ever went to. I was seventeen and went with my dad. He's an artist and read most of my comics. I did a short story to show around, but I was too shy to show it to anyone. My dad saw Ralph and Stu were looking at people's portfolios as he got me to show them mine. They liked it and said they would like to put it in their bizco. I was pretty excited because it was the first time someone besides my friends saw my work. I went home and did another story that week. It was a couple of months later they asked me to work on their zombie book.

#### WHAT SOME OF THE TITLE'S KEY INFLUENCES?

**RG:** I'm a big fan of the *Crying Dead* fan, and admirer of George Romero. I'd often wonder why no one was publishing a comic about his universe. I was also a fan of *Rebels of the Crying Dead* and its taking comics. So it wasn't long after that when I approached Stuart and Vince about doing a book on flesh-eating, talking zombies with a twist.

**VL:** There are so many influences. Dave Sim (*Cerebus*), Bill Sienkiewicz (*Judge Dredd*, *30 Steps of Ascent*), Jon J. Muth (*The Sandman*, *Sleeping Things*), Kent Williams (*Hellblazer*), Ben



ne Wrightson (*House of Mystery*, *Sleeping Things*), Michael Kaluta (*House of Mystery*, *House of Secrets*), and book and magazine illustrators from the early 20th century, especially Joseph Glavert Call and Harry Clarke.

#### DEADWORLD WAS THE FIRST COMIC I KNOW OF TO HAVE VARIANT COVERS. WHAT SORT OF GENERATION-SPIN ISSUES DID YOU ENCOUNTER DUE TO THEIR GRAPHIC NATURE?

**Gary Reed:** On issue #150, Mark Bloodworth drew a cover of a zombie ripping apart a baby. The book was held up at customs shipping into Canada. I had to explain that it was a dream sequence in the comic and didn't really happen, so they said that was okay. So, a dream sequence in a fictional piece of work was okay but if it was just the fiction part, it wouldn't have been. Bizarre.

**SK:** We weren't directly attacked by any groups advocating censorship, although you couldn't be in the industry at that time and not know about retailers who were faced with lawsuits and even criminal charges for selling stuff that would be considered tame by today's standards. However, we did get some comments from store owners when we went to conventions, saying it was hard to sell *Deadworld* because they had to keep it behind the counter with the cover art obscured and only the title showing. Once again, Ralph came up with the most pragmatic and simple idea: print the book with two covers, graphic and tame. One for the dedicated fan and one that could be put on the shelf to find potential new readers. If you ever wondered where the idea for variant covers and the like came from, this was it. Ralph's idea was a legitimate and brilliant idea to solve a particular marketing problem. Nowadays, it's just a way to seek the collector, in my humble opinion.



**RG:** We started what I think was the first of the variant covers in the industry. A gory cover and what we called a "tame cover," to be displayed on retailer shelves. Little did I know at the time we were creating variant cover fever for generations to come.

#### GARY, WHEN YOU CAME TO DEADWORLD, YOU BROUGHT A MASSIVE BUILT-TO-IT. HOW DID YOU BRIDGE TAKING OVER THE SERIES?

**GR:** Over time, in the first and second volumes, I injected more of myself into the series. It was also during this time that I was writing *House of David* and other series, so I was getting a better sense of what I wanted to do and say. But even with that, I've always felt that *Deadworld* in those days was something that was not 100 percent mine and I had to honour what came



before. Even the reboot, which was the Image series *Deadworld: Requiem for the World*, kept the skeleton of the original. I'd say that *Sludgehouse* and then the two follow-up series of *War of the Dead* and *Restoration*, are where I feel the *Deadworld* saga was now truly all mine, even though there is still attachment in terms of characters and situations from the original.

#### YOU'RE ALSO A BIDDY PROTECTOR; HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE SCIENCE INTO *DEADWORLD*?

GR: Well, the main problem with being a biologist is that I know there can't be any such things as traditional zombies, so there's that. But I think that in all fiction, certainly in comics, there's a given suspension of belief. I mean, if you ever really looked at the physical sciences and the viability of many superheroes or how a simple genetic mutation would give someone the ability to turn his body to steel or control the weather, it just can't co-exist. So, when I approach *Deadworld* scientifically, I have to step away from the zombie aspect and focus on how scientists would deal with the situation given that the zombies exist, no matter how. So I incorporate science by how the humans deal with it. You have the scientists rejecting people with viruses, cancer and bacteriophage like leprosy to see what happens when they get eaten by the dead. Are these diseases possibly transmittable? That was the premise of *Sludgehouse* in *War of*

the *Dead*, survivors of those inhuman treatments left a colony of lepers who had such diseased flesh they could walk amongst the zombies, as they couldn't be sensed. In *Restoration*, there's a doctor who tries to use nature itself in combating the zombies by using flesh-eating maggots to eat only the rotted flesh. Also, in a case of a captured intelligent zombie, the scientists attempt to use neurotransmitters and psychiatric treatments to see if they can brainwash, or at least affect, the intelligent zombies. It's a balance of bringing science in, yet you can't go too far or the series wouldn't be able to be written at all.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT OVERSIGHT OF ZOMBIES IN POP CULTURE, AND THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN *DEADWORLD* AND *THE WALKING DEAD*?

GR: It's weird that it's become mainstream. It's not bad, just weird. It was such a small-time cult thing when I started.

SK: I guess we were a little too far ahead of our time. I wish we had a TV show or a movie out

there along with the fortune that may bring, but we don't.

RG: As for the current crop of zombie culture and these right now, I'd like to think that I helped kick-start it all. There are a lot of great reads for the zombie horror fan in today's market. And, as you may know, we launched another zombie book titled *The Dead* [see p.78] continuing along the lines of our original vision.



GR: I continually get feedback on the similarities [between *Deadworld* and *The Walking Dead*], and of course they run the gamut of it being a direct rip-off to just being coincidence. *Walking Dead* has had a great impact on the [horror] comics market, some might say it was the driving force that saved it. That might be a bit hyperbolic but there's

no denying the incredible support it has given to the comics market. Also, I am only familiar with the TV show as I have never read the comic. I don't read any zombie literature because I don't want to be unconsciously influenced by anything.

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WITCHES AND VAMPIRES RETURN TO NEW ORLEANS IN ALYS ARDEN'S  
ONLINE SERIAL-TURNED-MASS MARKET NOVEL, **THE CASQUETTE GIRLS**

# BIG EASY BLOOD BATH

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER



## IT'S OFTEN SAID THAT A GOOD STORY HAS WINGS.

Certain blogs, ones that really click with readers, have a tendency to take on a life of their own — perhaps one not even the author intended. Alys Arden's *The Casquette Girls* is just such a book.

The novel — which Arden describes as having the “romanticism of Southern Gothic mixed with the goop of young adult” — like *If Mary Shelley and Joss Whedon had a lovechild* who was adopted and raised by Rosemary Ripstone and Taharrah Miel? — began its life as a popular online serial, then matured into a critically acclaimed indie novel, and is now about to embark on the final leg of its journey, becoming a traditionally published book.

“At the time I started writing, I was traveling 100 percent for work, which has its perks, but when you wake up in a different hotel room every week, it’s hard to do much else than work,” explains Arden. “I was really in need of a creative outlet that could fit in my suitcase. One of my friends suggested writing fiction. The very idea terrified me, which got me excited. I made a New Year’s resolution to commit to a project, signed up for a sci-fi/fantasy workshop, and ended up writing what would become the first three chapters. When the class ended, and I got back to my heavier work schedule, I wanted I wouldn’t lose the discipline to keep going. In search of accountability, I

joined Wattpad, an online writing community. I never thought I’d be able to complete an entire novel, but I certainly never thought people would read anything I wrote, but week by week the story gained a loyal following. [and readers] commented on their conspiracy theories, love interest choices for the heroines, their own personal experiences or their love for New Orleans. When I posted the ending, everything kind of exploded.”

The book, which follows several sixteen-year-old Adams in a town, is set after a hurricane plagues through New Orleans that’s so destructive it’s simply called “The Storm.” As the story begins, Adele is returning to the devastated city after spending two months staying, post-evacuation. She’s not home long before she encounters a dead body in a car and strange things begin to happen: a crow attacks her in her kitchen, a shutter flies off a building on a windless day, an old photograph suddenly winds itself. Soon, Adele realizes there’s one common factor in all these occurrences: herself. And if she concentrates really hard, she can move mobile objects. It’s the beginning of a revolution that will take her deep into the history of her family, as well as the history of the city itself, and straight into the grasp of the monsters.

“There were two main sources of inspiration for the book, the obvious one is the city of New Orleans, my hometown, and the less obvious one is the

Useless nuffs," says Arden (pictured). "Not looking before I started writing the book, I met one of my grandfather's cousins, who turned out to be one of the coolest people I had ever met. I had a hard time understanding how someone so cool could be a nun, so I started reading everything I could find about her sister, especially their role in colonial New Orleans. I discovered a theory that in the 16th and 17th centuries some women actually joined convents as an act of feminism. This shocked me, but the idea was that you didn't answer to men, you answered to God. I started spending time at the Old Convent, and when I remembered the urban legend there, I just happened to be taking a writing workshop, and so, my vampires were born."

In many ways, *The Casquette Girls* feels like a spiritual successor to fellow New Orleans author Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Both writers have played their trade with supernatural creatures and an abiding love of the city and its complex history. Given that, it's not surprising that Arden has a deep respect for Rice, even though she never intended her book as homage.

"Growing up in New Orleans, I started reading [Rice's] novels when I was young, maybe like six or seven?" she confesses. "As a teen, I thought her sexual backstory was like the *Matrix* of cool, so skimming last year for the first time—as a paid author!—was surreal. Mrs. Rice is a real book-lover's goddess; love her and strong connection with New Orleans, and I suspect that comes through in our work, and is what people pick up on, rather than simply the sex-horror aspects."

That enough, it's easy to describe Arden's book as a love letter to The Big Easy. It's banding with lush descriptions of the streets and the properties that line them. In reading, the city practically comes to life on the page, from the description of The Storm to the colorful roadshows behind the rebuilding process.

"New Orleans is about people," Arden explains. "People who believe in magic. People who believe in each other. People who get out there when systems are falling around them. New Orleans is imagination running a mile, not just because of carnival costumes, or saffron past, or the open-container law, because it's inescapably in the air we breathe. New Orleans is a mix of so many different cultures—religious, folkloric, myths—it lends itself to openness and possibility. A landscape of superstition hangs in the air, with the elements and weeps that surround all who enter."

Into this world, Arden weaves not only a long-standing ancestral curse, but witches and vampires and the centuries-long feud that has played out between them. It's a battle that Arden has mysteriously (and suspiciously) walked right into the capable, but she may actually have kick-started this war, too, as her new cover of witches goes to battle over more bodies pick up?

"I've always been attracted to rebellion and fascinated by the idea of the 'other' or those not fitting into the social norms, whether by choice or force," says Arden of what drew her to writing

a vampire story. "As a kid, I moved around a lot, and never really figured out where I fit in—I guess I still haven't figured that out. Magic and monsters both disrupt the idea of the mundane and mess with our constructs of good and bad, which interests me greatly."

After *The Casquette Girls*' initial online success, Arden decided to self-publish. At the time, she notes, she did not have any commercial expectations for the book. She decided to go her route primarily for her online fans, who were clamoring for a physical copy after the online draft collected over one million reads in six weeks.

"I treated the entire thing like an art project rather than a publishing project," she says. "All the moving parts were completely overwhelming, but by the time I finished, I felt like my New Year's resolution had come totally full circle, and I had broken out of my creative rut. Throughout that process [I had] a lot of requests from agents and editors, which only reinforced my decision to go indie because the majority of the correspondences went something like this: 'There. We love your book, here are all of things you need to change so you can work with us and get published.' Me: 'Okay, do you think that plotline/character/whatever is weak/poorly written?' Them: 'No, it's a amazing/wise, but that's not what's really right now.'"

In the end, after Arden's indie release generated a coveted starred review in *Publisher's Weekly*, was an award for its original cover (current cover art shown) and generated an small amount of good press, she ultimately signed with Amazonia Sky-

scape imprint for the book's re-release. Because the novel was born on the internet, working with an imprint owned by an internet company made sense to Arden, though she's quick to note that she will publish independently again, choosing to choose who to read for her work on a story-by-story basis.

"[The re-release provided the] unique opportunity to be able to make changes after the book has been published and before the second book has been released," she notes. "There was a lot of polishing and clanking up, but I did restructure the latter part of the book. In the re-release,

there is more about the curse, new scenes, more character development. I wanted there to be new things for fans, but not so much that it would confuse people reading the second book who didn't want to re-read the first book. My editorial team at Skycape completely understood this objective and I think we got to a place where everyone was happy, without too much pain. Despite typing the manuscript apart to a point that I was scared I wouldn't be able to put it back together, I actually loved the entire process."

Arden is currently hard at work on the book's sequel,

*The Romeo Catkins*, which is scheduled for a fall 2016 release. It can be previewed at [writpad.com/user/NyaArden/](http://writpad.com/user/NyaArden/).

"We'll get to know some of the supporting characters better," she promises of the sequel. "One in particular, we'll get to know much better. More humans, new scenes. Each cover member is going to have to make some tough choices. Loyalties will be tested. More urban legends and more La Nouvelle-Orléans, of course!"



# CINEMACABRE

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## ALL THAT AND A BAG OF CANDY

### TALES OF HALLOWEEN

Starring Sam Stone, Barry Bostwick and John Houseman  
Written and directed by Austin Corbin  
Rat Marshall, Mike Mendler et al  
Epic Pictures

Just like Halloween itself, a good anthology horror film gives us a variety of tasty morsels to chew on while we celebrate all manner of ghost, ghoul and gore. The classic form usually offers approximately five jolting tales of terror (such as in 1982's *Crossed*), but this time knows to present us scary stories as there are letters in the alphabet (ABCs of Death series). *Tales of Halloween*, the newest monster kid on the block, finds the sweet spot somewhere in the middle. In this ten-part anthology led by Austin Corbin and featuring directorial efforts by members of LA collective The October Society (including the *Saw* series' Owen Lynch Roussman and *Grease* director Paul Schrader), drunks, slashers and evil kids run amok in an otherwise quaint California neigh-

boredom on Halloween night.

Ranging from good to really good, the stories blend into one another with ease, and some overlap their welcome. Corbin's own effort, *Grease Greeting Ghost*, is the spookiest of the bunch, with a lot of atmosphere and a simple, effective punchline: Ned Marshall's class, *Bad Seed*, about a mutated pumpkin that goes on a splatstick spree of carnage, features a hilarious cameo by poster art legend Drew Struzan (his warlock role trumps the film's other numerous cameos, including John Landis, Mick Garris and Barbara Crompton). But it's *Andy the 2nd*, by Mike Mendler (*Big Ass Spider*), about a masked killer who has the tables turned on him by an adorable little alien, that stands out. Also of note is UK composer Ashley Thorpe's musical opening sequence, made even better by out-of-retirement soundtrack legend Lalo Schiffrin's grand-scale theme music. All of this comes together with the vibe of a Disney movie-of-the-week gone horribly wrong. *Tales* is noticeably lighter in tone than other similar anthologies, but the fact that it really captures the season, with its beautiful bags of candy and charmingly cheap

props, makes it great annual viewing. The newest anthology to enter horror's hallowed halls is fun as hell, just like Halloween should be.

TAL ZIMMERMAN

## FAMILY FEUD

### SINISTER 2

Starring Liv Ullmann, Sherry Sussman  
and Robert Shaw  
Directed by David Foy  
Written by Scott Coenbass and G. Robert Gault  
Epic/Panavision Inc.

Ever notice that when horror movie characters watch horror movies on TV, it's almost always *Night of the Living Dead*? No doubt its public domain status explains why it's sampled so much, but in *Sinister 2* it's quoted for a reason. The "tuning" of little Karen in the basement, from sympathetic docility to mindless killing machine, effectively punctures our image of childhood. *Sinister*, the 2012 Scott Coenbass film, took up the same idea by exploring how demonic influence can corrupt innocence. Here David Foy, working from a script by the same writers, shows how the seeds for the monstrous are planted long before anything supernatural enters the picture.

Sherry Sussman, leading considerably more to a stock single-Mom-in-jeopardy role, arrives at an old farmhouse with two boys in tow. The fact that they're already on the run adds some intrigue. While *Sinister* had a Stephen



King-like focus on a desperate writer introducing a timeless threat to his family, this follow-up achieves a single audience surrogate, instead, an ensemble approach contributes to the impression that *Sinister 2* could accurately be described as an exercise in family drama that's



occasionally punctuated by verbiage home movies depicting grisly murders that characterizations may or may not float your boat, but it does indicate this thoughtful film's desire to balance somethings with shocks. Sure, the same-predictable jump scares, some what familiar waste, continues com-

fields and stock characters (ie. the abusive Dad) hardly seem fresh, but there are other, unexpected pleasures to be had.

As a holiday character from the first film, James Ransone is startlingly good as a bumbling investigator, at times lost puppy and charming romantic lead. He's a man without a family who's obsessed with saving families. But saving them from what exactly? Is it Bughost, the demon we're told has (gasp!) appeared "hundreds of centuries"? Or is it young Dylan (Robert Sheehy), whose withdrawn nature effects greatly losses that urge him to dispatch his actual family as a prerequisite for joining them?

While not a home run, *Sinister 2*'s arthral plotting, psychological ambitions, unsettling score and satisfying third-act plot twist make it much more than your standard phantasm in sequel.

PETER GUTWASSER

## THE RETURN OF IRON MUXE

### TURBO KID

Starring: Milla Jovovich, Laurence Lafia

and Michael Ironside

Written and directed by François Girard, Amos Korman

and Yoon-Ki Hong

Raven Banner

A blast from an alternate future past, *Turbo Kid* is a blend of post-apocalyptic imagery and coming-of-age themes that takes place in a world where water is scarce and BIKAX bikes are the preferred mode of transport. Based on film collective Roskill Superstar's popular *T* for *Turbo* short, unapologetically for the ASXC of Gen Z, *Turbo Kid* is a loving pastiche of everything '80s, right down to the Day Glo costumes, synth scores and 8-bit imagery.

The film involves orphaned scavenger The Kid (Milla Jovovich), who stumbles on a laser-blasting power glove in an abandoned spacecraft. Moulding himself in the image of his favourite comic book superheroes, The Kid goes



up against a menacing water hoarder, Zeus (Michael Ironside), and his evil gang led by masked enforcer Skulleton (Elwin Wright). When his only friend, the oddy clipper Apple (Laurence Lafia) is kidnapped, The Kid must free her with the help of a mysterious mentor, Fredone (Aaron Jeffrey).

Coming on like a sugar rush during a Saturday morning cartoon marathon, *Turbo Kid* mixes action, comedy and horror in equal doses, but the deliciously over-the-top gore

sometimes seems at odds with the otherwise light-hearted tone. Regardless, for example, if the *Goonies* was infused with *Dad* Zeeb-influenced splatter. It's an approach that plays better with a raucous midnight crowd than on your TV, which is why the movie is probably best to catch at a festival screening.

While it primarily runs on steady injections of nostalgia, *Turbo Kid*'s biggest chance is getting to see Canadian character actor icon Michael Ironside back on screen as the eye-patched villain, a performance that's more fun than popping wheelies at the dirt bike track.

PAUL CORNELL

## NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

### EXTINCTION

Starring: Matthew Fox, Jeffrey Donovan

and Quinn McColgan

Directed by Miguel Ángel Vivas

Written by Juan de Dios Escobar, Alberto Marín

and Miguel Ángel Vivas

Sony

Zombies, and zombie films, just won't stay dead. *Extinction*, an English-language Spanish production, takes place long after the first zombie outbreak. Two men, Patrick and Jack (Matthew Fox and Jeffrey Donovan, respectively), are assigned to living right across the street from one

another, though they refuse to talk or contain resources. Patrick favours hunting and leaving his compound daily to get fresh meat. This keeps his pantry stocked and his body busy through the long lonely days on the tundra landscape. Jack is much more cautious and avoids the outside world at all costs.

Jack's young daughter Lu (Quinn McColgan) is getting to the age where her father's warnings against going outside pale in comparison to her curiosity about the world beyond their fence. Her interest in Patrick's steady supply of fresh kills and his companion dog are too strong for her to ignore forever.

As we learn more about the movie's misfired history, they realize that the zombies they thought were extinct are anything but gone. The rules, the threat and various decisions have either evolved their last cunning kit, or evolved beyond them. The men have to put aside their differences if they're going to survive the monsters, but that's easier said than done.

Though the score is at times overwrought and the movie occasionally lags, *Extinction* offers a new angle on zombies and a well done take on interpersonal drama. The zombies infirily act similar to the walking dead we're so used to seeing in film but they do have a few surprises for us, their lack of vision is an advantage to our survivors, but their speed and agility are completely unexpected. Patrick and Jack's history is slightly melodramatic, but engaging as more of their tortured pasts unfold. And McColgan as the young Lu is a welcome change of pace from your typical child actor. She's able to be resourceful without tipping into annoying precocious.

Like so many horror films, *Extinction* is much more about human drama than human carnage, thankfully, it handles both nicely.

DEBORAH GRIMMERS



Extinction





*Harbinger Down*

## SURE AIN'T NO THING

### HARBINGER DOWN

Starring Loree Heniksen, Camille Bakemo  
and Matt Wozniak  
Written and directed by Alex Gilis  
Vertical Entertainment

How recent genre films have been as eagerly anticipated as *Harbinger Down* Gold as a return to the old-school practical FX monster movie, it reportedly generated the highest ever pledges for a crowd-funded sci-fi/horror project in the six-year history of Kickstarter, and was born out of the frustrations felt by makeup artist Alex Gilis (co-founder of Amalgamated Dynamics) at his company's animatronic creations being supplanted by CGI in the ill-received 2011 remake of *The Thing*.

Now making his bones as a writer/director, Gilis' unvarnished plot sees grad student Eddie (Camille Bakemo) secure passage on her grandfather's (Jeff's) (James Heniksen) crumbling trawler in order to study the effects of global warming on a pod of beluga whales in the Bering Sea. Instead, the crew discovers a crashed Soviet spacecraft hidden amongst the icebergs and dredges up the frozen wreckage. They learn that the Russians have been experimenting with biotronics, interdimensional water-dwelling nano-entities engineered to survive extreme environments. As the craft and its occupants thaw out, these mutated organisms attack the mariners, transforming them into tentacled, leechy monstrosities. Armed only with a flare gun and a few tanks of liquid nitrogen, Eddie and the crew

must battle to survive this molecular menace.

Despite skillfully presenting the reptile-slasher quality and chilly tone, Gilis is less assured in handling the finer points of his story without recourse to gaudification. *Harbinger Down*'s true scuffed by this admixture of horror and plays like a faithful fan work to *Alien* and *The Thing* (even the prologue occurs on June 25, 1982, the release date for Carpenter's inflection movie). The functional script occasionally battles all

tenor and is fouled by some standard posturing and nervous exchanges from a largely dispensable cast—although Heniksen is fine as the pitted captain.

Most discouraging is the fact that not all of the much-hyped, slime-secreting monsters (which, for the most part, are abjectly shrouded in darkness and glimpsed only in swirling flashlight) are rendered fearfully. Although *Harbinger Down* is no way represents a

backward step, it's not the film it initially promised to be and reaffirms the suggestion that the road to cinematic mediocrity is often paved with false assurances.

MICHAEL O'NEILL

## NEEDS EXTRA EXTRATERRESTRIALS

### ALIEN OUTPOST

Starring Joe Rogan, Rick Ravanello and Douglas Malt  
Directed by Jabbar Raisani  
Written by Jabbar Raisani and Mike Gilman  
Shred Factory

Many a film tries to surpass its budgetary limitations and lips up before the finish line. *Alien*

*Outpost* (it's a *Outpost* 37) falls into this category, and while it gives it the old college try, there are problems that go beyond the financial.

Jabbar Raisani's (VFX Supervisor on *Game of Thrones* and *Predators*) directorial debut is the definition of a "good on paper" concept: a documentary crew is dispatched to an outpost, one of the last still in use after a thwarted alien invasion years ago. Stationed in Afghanistan, the overworked and underfunded soldiers ensuring it must repel and hunt down the remaining "Invasions," left behind when the invaders fled Earth. We get glimpses of the war through brief news clips, archives and testimonials from Outpost 37's crew, there's a good story waiting in the wings and the set-up is intriguing. A good idea, though, is never enough, and the film fails to deliver in its execution.

When facing budgetary limitations, it's important to have a trackload of creative solutions to make up for 'em. Sadly, there are few on display here, and we end up with sothin they're clear characters (including the farm boy with a girl back home), a slow-moving storyline that meanders to its final act, combat scenes rendered indistinguishable by shaky cam and (the worst offense) minimal action. If you're going to do a B-movie movie, at least give us monsters. By the time the film starts to deliver with a decidedly bloodier and more intense finale, it's too little, too late. And it's a shame, because there's potential for a tight little movie here. There is, however, a glimmer





of hope in a post-credits scene that hints at a bigger, more ambitious sequel. With a more polished and cohesive story (budget be damned), a follow-up might be worth the wait. As for *Alvin Gulpst*, it's bonused by metacritics.

RON MCKENZIE

## CYBER HELL

### DARK SUMMER

Starring Kier Gledhill, Stella Kline and Martin Harrell  
Directed by Paul Goid  
Written by Mike La  
Screenplay

Talk about a lean, mean, gore-splattered hell. In *Dark Summer*, boy media girl, boy stalker girl, boy hacker girl's computer and social media accounts, boy gets sentenced to house arrest, boy's friends help him acquire illicit Internet connection, girl video-calls boy and makes him watch her blow her brains out. If the sounds like an unbelievable escalation, you wouldn't be wrong and it's a genuine relief when a character in the film comes right out and says so, because it's what we're all thinking.

Directed by Paul Goid (*Goid*, *Taker of Mothers*), *Dark Summer* is an intriguing if problematic film. Its first nearly unmountable hurdle involves getting its audience to care about convicted stalker Daniel (Kier Gledhill). He doesn't deny his guilt, and while (incestuous) his victim, is shocking and unexpected, when she starts haunting him it's hard not to feel like he's just getting some supernatural compensation to go along with his legal consequences. The haunting escalates as these things do, becoming more violent and malicious with each passing day, until he's finally able to convince his friends that he's not experiencing a mental break but an actual paranormal event. After which, they collectively use the Internet to figure out how to communicate with the spirit and hopefully stop it.

*Dark Summer* is a good-looking film, full of long, eerie, dimly lit hallways and slow tracking shots of computer cables and other items in Daniel's home. The haunting works best (and is creepiest) in the moments where the ghost can't be seen (for instance, the X that's carved over Daniel's face in the bathroom mirror, and when his friends discover the contents of the secret room behind Mona's closet, but dead Mona herself isn't particularly frightening. In fact, her ghoulish rainy makeup makes her look more like a rain-soaked goth girl than a vengeful spirit.

*Dark Summer* has its moments, and definitely beats its first third, but it's a tough order putting an unlikely character front and center in a feature. Take note: stalkers and bullies just don't make for great good guys.

MONICA S. KIRKLEIR



## OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

### THIS ISSUE: LANCE CURSES CURSED OBJECTS

#### BOARD TO DEATH



#### I AM ZORO

Another Day Entertainment

Ever come across something that just gave you a really bad case of the creeps? A vintage doll, a blurry old photograph, a bottle of Crystal Pepsi — some things aren't meant for the Earth but all the creepy objects scattered away in your attic, none are scarier than a Dug's board. Purportedly based on true events, *I Am Zoro* features five kids who decide to celebrate Halloween alone in a cottage on a remote island, and bring along a Dug's board for fun. They soon find themselves in a battle with a malevolent spirit named Zoro who wants to kill them. Shot entirely on Super 8mm, the film has a cool, voyeuristic quality to it, but suffers immensely from uneven pacing and being dragged, making *Zoro* only a second-hand horror.

BOON COUNT: 2

LAMEST DEATH: Athena attack

#### NASTY LITTLE PRICE



#### NEEDLE

Leviathan

This Acme film takes a stab at the college-campus serial killer trope that's been being cashed since James Earl Ray. Years after his father passed away, Ben receives a mysterious box that seems to have some unknown sinister purpose. His investigation reveals it's an ancient revenge machine that crafts working wax victims. His suspicions are confirmed when the box is stolen and his friends start dying in strange ways. Though it plays out a little too generic, *Needle* does offer a few solid red-herring and guinea-pig kills. The acting is mediocre at best, though *Leviathan* star Emma Fennell (TV's *Wrecked*) who deserves every scene he's in. The box itself is the best thing about the movie — just don't let the *Needle* shoot it!

BOON COUNT: 7

LAMEST DEATH: Dropping dead while jogging

#### PURPOSE WITH A REDGLASS



#### FADING OF THE CRIES

Leviathan

Wagner never guessed that wearing that piece of jewelry she found in the attic would release an army of demons upon the world. And she couldn't have imagined that she'd be so on the run with a hot-as-hell stranger who looks like a cross between Neo from *The Matrix* and Brandon Lee from *The Green Hornet*. That sounds exciting, I realize, because nothing could be further from the truth. *Fading of the Cries* is a mess, filled to the brim with silly CGI and shallow acting. Not even one of my favorite actors, David Dour (Zoro's *Play*), can save the picture, as he takes on the role of a psychotic, homicidal man who appears to be about as interested in acting in the movie as I was watching it.

BOON COUNT: 5/1

LAMEST DEATH: A little rip on the rivet

LAST LANCE LANCE

THE HOLIDAY SEASON COMES EARLY  
FOR HORROR FANS WITH  
A CHRISTMAS HORROR STORY,  
A GLEEFULLY CORY ANTHOLOGY  
FROM THE MAKERS OF  
THE GINGER SNAPS SERIES

# DRESSED IN RED

by SEAN FLEMING

**T**HE MOST HORRIFYING THING ABOUT CHRISTMAS IS USUALLY THE CREDIT CARD BILLS AND DINNER WITH THE IN-LAWS, but one film aims to change that. *A Christmas Horror Story* (the title a riff on the Rod Clark Canadian holiday classic *A Christmas Story*) is an anthology whose four stories weave in and out of each other like the ones in the 2009 film *Wick & Frank*, meaning that the tales, characters and themes exist as different narrative threads in the same universe instead of being presented one after the other, as in *Crossedover* or *Tales from the Crypt*.

"The problem with those movies — and I do love them — is that you can sometimes get film festival fatigue watching them because each story has a beginning, a middle and an end," says producer/co-director Steve Hoban (*Ginger Snaps* — who helmed the "Santa" segment — from the film's set in Toronto). "It isn't like a typical feature film experience, and the whole point of this is to make a theatrical film experience that is fun."

In "Santa," the bearded gift-giver does bloody battle with his elves on Christmas Eve after they become zombies. For "Nativity," by Grant Harvey (*Ginger Snaps Back: The Beginning*), three teens are locked in the basement of their high school, a former convent, by the ghost of a teen who misheard their debates earlier. Brett Sullivan (*Ginger Snaps 2: Unleashed*) directs both "Kissmou" and "Changeling," the former is about a naughty family that gets a nasty visit from the mythical horned monster, and the latter about a couple's young son who goes missing in the woods and returns an hour later as something evil.

While the North Pole is rendered almost entirely with CGI, most of the film's effects are done practically. This is evidenced by the crew member

artfully dropping what is meant to be elfin blood on a vinyl Toronto studio floor during our early 2014 set visit. Producer Mark Smith (Hoban's lead in-camera effects and costs them whenever possible).

"Even in the bigger-budget things, you know you're looking at CGI," he says. "In the horror world, and I know for myself, I'll take — I'm not saying we have cheap prosthetics — but I'll take a cheaper prosthetic if I know it's something in the room interacting with the actor versus something that is beautifully created in the computer but I know there's some guy in a green suit interacting with a tennis ball on a stick. And I think that translates to most film fans. You just want that tactile feel."

Totally, much of *A Christmas Horror Story* — but October 2 from e1 — is dark as a lump of coal. These are children in danger, families torn apart (both literally and figuratively), and vengeful, bloody ghosts. The only time references are intentionally meant to laugh instead of shudder — other than when local DJ Dangerous Dan (William Shaffer in a fun cameo) speaks — is during "Santa," when our bearded hero wields his crozier to cut down his former employees in increasingly creative ways. It is, not surprisingly, also the movie's goriest story.

"Just to give you an example, Santa is overpowered by a few elves," says Smith of one of the film's cruelest kills. "He takes the head of one of the dead elves, sticks his fingers through the eye sockets, and uses it like a bowling ball to get another one. That gives you an idea of how bloody we're pushing it."

Asked if he hopes *A Christmas Horror Story* will become an annual tradition in creepy Christmas households the way, say, *A Christmas Story* or *It's a Wonderful Life* has, Hoban says, "That would be perfect. That is exactly what we need. The world could use a little bit of that, don't you think? Certainly my family would watch it!"



Illustration: "Hoban" (Hoban)

A man in a red cap and sunglasses holds a rifle, standing in a field. Another man is visible in the background.

# GRABOIDS IN AFRICA

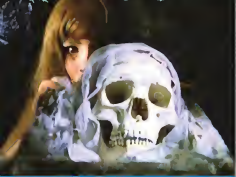
A man in a red cap and sunglasses holds a rifle, standing in a field. Another man is visible in the background.

A photograph of two men in a wooded area. The man in the foreground is wearing a red baseball cap, sunglasses, and a camouflage-patterned jacket over a red shirt. He is holding a long rifle vertically. The man in the background is wearing a dark jacket and a light-colored shirt, and is looking towards the camera. The background is a dense forest with trees and foliage.

A photograph of two men in a wooded area. The man in the foreground is wearing a red baseball cap, sunglasses, and a camouflage-patterned jacket over a red shirt. He is holding a long rifle vertically. The man in the background is wearing a dark jacket and a light-colored shirt, and is looking towards the camera. The background is a dense forest with trees and foliage.



## REISSUES



## SURREAL YOUNG THING

## VALERIE AND HER WEEK OF WONDERS (1970)

Starring Jaroslava Schallerová, Helena Rýsová  
and Petr Rákos  
Directed by Jaromír Jires  
Written by Jaromír Jires and Ota Kratochvíl  
Criterion

Adolescence is a surreal experience for most of us, but particularly for girls. Even if you grow

up in an idyllic country house in a picturesque village, the scares and double standards of womanhood lurk in the shadows, and they're even more threatening than your uncle/father — the vampire who has seduced your girlfriend/cousin/mother into giving away your land. Confused? That's okay. The departure from innocence doesn't always make sense, but it can certainly be scary, which is the gist of *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, Jaromír Jires' surreal, fun-ner Czechoslovakian film based on the 1632 novel of the same name.



Thirteen-year-old Valerie (Jaroslava Schallerová) lives with her grandmother, Elsa (Helena Rýsová). Elsa cares for Valerie but is jealous of her youth, so she takes up the offer of immortality from the vampire known as Palecat (Jiri Prinsok) in exchange for the deed to her house, which actually belongs to Valerie. Fortunately for our heroine, Valerie has magical peat carriages and a friend in English (Petr Rákos), who warns her when evil is afoot, but even English might not be what he seems...

The storyline unfolds out of order, depicting Valerie's coming-of-age as a disjointed and unsettling dream that borders on the nightmarish. Interestingly, Valerie is rarely terrified of the events that befall her, and she approaches everything with carefree innocence — even when she's wrongfully convicted of seducing the lecherous town priest (Jan Kuská) and sentenced to the stake. It's just another day in Valerie's wondrous week, and the film's beautiful cinematography sinister journey into a dark fairy tale that's captivating from start to finish.

This Criterion release celebrates the film with

fascinating extras, including recent interview material with film scholar Peter Hames, the film's stars Jaroslava Schallerová and Jan Kuská, and an excellent essay in the liner notes by Jens Peiryl that shines some light on Czech folklore and the role of director Jaromír Jires among the Czechoslovakian New Wave of avant-garde filmmakers. If you loved the dark mythos of *Phia's Ladybirth* and crave a dose of the Czechoslovakian bizarre, tag along with Valerie and Her Week of Wonders.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

## HOME (NOT) ALONE

## THE PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS (1991)

Starring Everett Ruessell, Wendy Banks and Vag Rastvor  
Written and directed by Wes Craven  
Screen Factory

Wes Craven is best known for such slasher classics as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Scream*, and if he's like his lesser-known films are sometimes swept under the rug. But to the knowing horror fan these films are an absolute joy, mixing Craven's signature horror and batshit bizarre concepts. And none of them are more successful at that than *The People Under the Stairs*.

The story tells of a young boy nicknamed Fool (real name Ponderosa, played by Brandon Quintin Adams), who's recruited by his father's boyfriend on his thirteenth birthday to rob his landlords in order to pay for his mother's cancer operation. Little do they know that the landlords are an insane couple whose house hides multiple horrors, including traps, a savage dog, cannibals, mutilated crossbuds in the basement and a maddening leather grip suit. When they become trapped, Fool must figure out how to escape the place alive.

What's strange about the film, aside from the grip suit, is that it's very much a story of class division and the Reagan-era, set up like a gothic fairy tale, with its spooky house and themes of horror and coming of age. Despite its political trappings and dark subject matter, however, *TPUS* is really fun. It's easy to imagine the film being made today, with its scenes of karkun, child abuse and implied rape. Luckily, Craven knew better than to make these elements the main focus, hiding most of the film's deep underlying terror and biting at it through one-liners or small details.

Screen Factory comes through yet again, delivering a wealth of supplements not seen on Universal's bare-bones release last year.



These include two audio commentaries, one from the child actors of the film (justices) and one from Craven himself (narrating), as well as four interviews, including one with actress Wendy Huddle, and two vintage behind-the-scenes featurettes. Sadly absent is a routine/retrospective featurette.

All in all, *The People's Choice* the Stars is one of Craven's best and most underappreciated films. Hopefully with this Blu-ray release it will find a whole new audience of leather-grip appreciators.

BRETT MCNEILL

## SOME CHILLER, SOME FILLER

### CRYPT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1973) Blu-ray

Starring Andrew Price, Teresa Gimenez and Mark Giamber  
Directed by Ray Garton and Julio Salazar  
Written by Ricardo Barrena, Luis Giletti, Julio Salazar,  
et al  
Vinyl: Screambox

What a difference a decent transfer makes: Vinegar Syndrome's new HQ adaption of public domain staple *Crypt of the Living Dead* reveals that there was something of a halfway decent '70s vampire chiller under all those scratches, fades and print damage. Shot in Turkey with Spanish money and costing in at least three different versions with four different titles, it's a film you probably already have in your collection in some form, but this pristine new release is the perfect opportunity to give it a proper spin and see what you may have missed.

Of course, "halfway decent" is still the key idea here, since low horror films would ever confuse the film with anything particularly notable. Andrew Price headlines as Chris, a supernatural skeptic who heads to a secluded island where his father, an archaeologist, was recently crushed by a heavy stone sarcophagus lid in an underground chamber. Bliving off warnings from the locals, Chris opens the tomb and inadvertently lets out Hersh (Teresa Gimenez), a vampire who casts her spell to gain control of the island population. Euro-horror favorite Mark Giamber is also on hand as the increasingly unhinged Peter, who helps Chris remove his dad's body, but is spurning under mysterious motives.

Despite the film's shady image and clichéd story, the new transfer reveals some distinct atmosphere lacking in the callused, courtesy of original Spanish director Julio Salazar (opportunistically recut with newly shot scenes by Ray Garton for a US release). Looking on par with other cat-in-the-hat and Spanish horror films of the era, there's more than enough moody shots of the foggy island and distant

gothic touches to help ease the movie through its roughest narrative patches.

As a bonus, this film's been paired with the South Africa-shot *House of the Living Dead*, a talky, occasionally tedious period effort involving animal blood transfusions, voodoo and a fixation on close-ups of a horse painting. Vinegar Syndrome's re-release of these trademarked overused titles seems genuinely geared towards savvy world-horror trash fanatics, but the high-quality presentation should provide a neatly painless experience for interested reacquaintances. So don't be afraid to toss away these dollar-bin discs — this is the only way to see these films, in all their molting glory.

PHIL CONNOR

## MATERNAL INSTINCTS

### MOM (1991) DVD

Starring Mark Thomas Miller, Joanne Bales  
and Brian Jones  
Directed by Patrick Rand  
Written by Patrick Rand and Gail Waters  
MGM

A boy loves his mother. What wouldn't he do for her? Especially if he were to discover that she's a werewolf.

Such is the premise behind *Mom*, a little-known 1991 film from MGM that was recently re-released under the company's Limited Edition umbrella. Starring Joanne Bales as the title character, it's the story of Emily, an elderly woman let by a doctor with the fanciful name of Nestor Duverrier (the always excellent Brian Jones, whose lone in the film is far too short), who happens to be

a werewolf. Emily soon becomes a blatheringly loquacious and, following Nestor's death, is forced to deal with her newfound taste for Leah Melnikoff, her news-reporter son (Mark Thomas Miller) tries to keep the whole situation under wraps, even as he becomes a suspect in a series of gruesome killings caused by... well, if you can't figure it out at this point, you're likely watching the wrong film. Though Mom could have (and perhaps should have) been played for laughs, all the actors take their parts seriously, and while there's nothing in the way of real scares here, there's certainly something entertaining about watching a sweet grandmother-type turn all kangs and gone, even if the special effects are dated. Emily is a sympathetic character, a victim of circumstance and her own generosity, and Bales, who began her career under contract to Columbia Pictures in the 1940s, does a decent job with what she has to work with, which, truthfully, isn't all that much.

The one and only Italian film from director/co-writer Patrick Rand, who had previously worked as an editor on *Batman's Excellent Adventure*, *Mom* really is little more than a slightly interesting footnote in the world of werewolf flicks. However, while it may not be on the level of a certifiable classic such as *An American Werewolf in London*, or even *Wolf*, released just three years later, *Mom's* teeth are still sharper than anything you'll find in the Twilight films.

ANDY BURNIS



## EIGHT LEGS, DOZENS OF JOKES

### MST3K: EARTH VS. THE SPIDER (1991)

Starring Joel Hodgson, Kevin Murphy and Trace Beaulieu  
Directed by Jim Mallon  
Written by Joel Hodgson, Mike Nelson, et al  
Screen Factory

"I'm putting my entire on the spider!" proclaims Tom Servo as the credits unspool for the Mystery Science Theater 3000's take on the maddening Bert I. Gordon creation's feature *Earth vs. The Spider* (1958). This early episode is the clear highlight on the latest volume of MST3K DVD's (their 32nd), alongside justly forgotten genre pics *Agent for K.A.I.F.M.*, *Daddy-O* and *Tourange*. *Crime Movie*.

In this third season episode, Joel (Joel Hodgson), Crow T. Robot (Trace Beaulieu) and Tom Servo (Kevin Murphy) are set to goof on Gordon's usual crudely rendered effects — in this case, hairy spiders scaling pedestrians of famed film location Caribbea Caverns. After her dad goes missing, Carol (Jane Kennedy) and her boyfriend Mike (Gene Pearson) discover a giant hairy-jello-sucking spider has taken up residence in a cave on the outskirts of town ("Look for a dry guy in a silk bag, pass it along"). Basted with DOT, the attacking arachnid appears dead, but later awakens to put the town in a sticky situation before being driven back to its lair.

While still a far cry from Jack Arnold's *Tarantula* (1954) over at Universal, *Earth vs. The Spider* is still a marked improvement for Gordon, with

a few droll gross-out shots and some tense moments when the starved spider awakens in the school gym — in the middle of an impromptu rock band rehearsal happening just a few feet from its presumed carcass. Joel and the "bots pick up on this, as well as Gordon's propensity for giant spider POV kills ("Everybody's afraid of these crime stalks"), the dozens of skeletons in the cave ("I'm finished!") and the casual callousness of Mike to the girl over his likely dead father ("Oops, slipped on a little of your dad there — guess I'll have to throw my shoe in the grave!").

There's more fun throughout, with a short on proper diction and an hilarious skit where Joel and Tom workshop Crow's screenplay for "Earth vs. Soap," featuring eight pages of a diner waitress screaming as the tubler marries adjectives on her "on all fours" ("Well, you think soap is a bopd?" quips Crow when questioned). While perhaps not the greatest selection of episodes compared to other recent MST3K sets, the presence of *Earth vs. The Spider* makes this release worth buying yourself up in — even if the spider doesn't win.

PHIL CORPSE

## DUST 'N' BONES

### GHOST TOWN (1988)

Starring Frank Langford, Catherine Hickland  
and Joanne F. Shegge  
Directed by Richard Donner  
Written by Oskar Roederer  
Screen Factory

There is nothing particularly scary about the western genre. No, there are deaths and bad guys and rationsakes but no scores, mansters or gore. But *Dust 'N' Bones* combines the western

and horror genres (perhaps only to literalize its title), and while it's not completely successful, it does take the idea far an interesting spin.

The story goes like this: Kato (Catherine Hickland) has run away from the altar. Driving through a desert she's overcome by a dust cloud (that evokes the sound of horse hooves) and swiftly disappears. She's followed by county sheriff Langley (Frank Langford), who's led to the trailer town, where its ghostly inhabitants are plagued by a curse that has stretched over a hundred years.

Now, Langley has to find a way to break the curse before he too becomes a part of the town's permanent population.

Despite being a very low budget feature, *Ghost Town*'s makeup effects are great, and mostly the best part of the movie. From a delirious ghost to a gnarly crucifixion, the make-up is surprisingly effective, making the film feel more like a horror movie than a western.

The problem is, even with these effects, it isn't very scary. *Ghost Town* attempts to create an eerie atmosphere with ghosts showing up to talk to the sheriff, but they become tiresome. The slow pace — Langley just can't seem to find Kato, even though the town only has one street — also dulls the film.

Screen Factory's Blu-ray doesn't come with any extras so don't expect any insight into *Ghost Town*. However, if you're in the mood for a movie that you once might have picked up on a whim from a VHS rental store, you could do a lot worse.

BRETT MCNEIL



**WE GIVE THREE BRONX CHEERS FOR THE SPECIAL EDITION RETURN OF ENZO G. CASTELLARI'S ULTRA-VIOLENT POST-APOCALYPSE TRILOGY**

**FLAMETHROWERS** HAPPINESS IS A WARM

by ADAM CLARKE

**E**NOZO S. CASTELLARI EXPERIENCED A LATE PERIOD RE-EVALUATION WHEN SEVENTH TARRANTING CITED THE SPAGHETTI EXPLANATION DIRECTOR'S DIRTY BOZEN KNOCK-OFF, THE IN-CLOROUS BASTARDE AS A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON HIS SIMILARLY TITLED FILM. Castellari's real legacy, however, is his future history: 1980's *The Grass Whistle*, Escape From The Grass and *The New Bastard* roll on the heels of *Mid-Mary Road*, Jose Underground has reinvented these films, but what is to be gleaned from these glimpses of Salazar's past and, oh, Salazar?

For starters, remember 1980, when the world marveled at Mikhail Gorbachev's haircut, relating to NY SWH via and just couldn't stop doing the "bitchin' '80s, Casablanca 1980: the Power of Women (1982) is nothing like that. It's great black rap-of-brother, it pulls from contemporary life, particularly Crips from New York, The Warriors and the first two *Blade* Mike Smith, as it depicts the neighborhood of New York's five boroughs as a lawless wasteland. A number of gangs rise from this anarchy, and notably The Punks, led by Trash (Mike Gargary), whose traits characteristic is his ironic attempt to show off as much of his chest as

possible while still wearing a shirt. He's a bare. Luckily, Fred "The Hammer" Wilmore (The Inbetweeners' Jodie Whittaker) picks up the slack as The Omen, the head of another Bronx gang, who provides the film with Bruce Campbell-like swagger.

When the teenage believers of an arms-manufacturing company turn away and fella for Tinseltown, the young lovers have to negotiate their safe passage through various gang territories in the Bronx while avoiding a temporary played by Viggo Mortensen (*Twilight Zone*). The *Witness*, who only comes to life during the film's climax, when his character dons a leather daddy suit and delivers a monologue to part half of the deal with French sword

Made in the same year but set a decade later, *Escape From the Planet of the Apes* jumps into the 21st century with a very similar vision. *Escape* is almost a remake of its predecessor, as another corporation dominates the area and Trash enters various gangs and craves to defeat the corporate thugs. But this time, character actor Henry Silva (the original *Planet of the Apes* Dr. Zedek) is on board as the heavy Silva breeds *Escape* like a hawk and loses a good deal to play a character more

De Niro, who plays him, says "No sugar! It makes me GARY-DEAR!" while spending much of the film in sugar-stained bed. The role of "charismatic New York leader" for Escobar is taken up by Antonio Sabato Jr. as Danilo, whose solo direction in the film is to deliver a broader performance than Silvio. As in 1965, Escobar gets their skulls crushed with baseball bats, but this time the flame-thrower warms up in the first act. Plus, we get suicide bombers and jets with a-bombard. De Niro, Escobar (No More) was ridiculed on Mystery Science Theater 3000 (under its alternate title, Escape 2009).

Waiting further into the future — at 2010 — The New Darkness is more of a spiritual successor to the series, bringing back several cast members from each film for a new story in which religious fanaticism in Abu Dhabi-capped cities terrorizes the sole survivors of a post-apocalyptic wasteland. In *Allegory*, Giuseppe Pirelli had a small role as a lawyer who takes out most of John's goons with the help of a pre-adultress' explosives expert. Now he stars as a variation of that character, a lawyer who sides with against a gang of hell guys with the help of a post-apocalyptic scientist (Shawn's *Future*), the incoming lead from *House of the Dead*. First *Allegory* seemed dead, but the red claw lers in the desert

a hotbed of religious fanaticism, exploding arrows, exploding heads, exploding bodies, Kamei Simpson's bubble dance cars, a broken Gloria Steinem's score and absolutely no trace of the "corporate intrigue" featured in the *Street Kings*.

But Underground has provided film nerds with the best transition these films have received (an upgrade from the high-quality transfer of *Stammes'97* previous release of this trilogy). For extra, extra great fun is offered up a low-key commentary with Castellani and a conversation between Castellani and producer Fabrizio Angeli spread out over the three discs. (Fun fact: Castellani was originally slated to direct *Jurassic*) *Stammes'97* offers the best feature, a brief interview with Fred Williamson tracing his transition from sports hero to B-movie star. While each film is more or less self-contained, they all make for fine watching should you cut nostalgia for yesterday's look at a wild, low-serious.



FILMMAKER TIM SULLIVAN HELPS RESURRECT **COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE** FOR BLU-RAY AND SHARES A RARE INTERVIEW HE CONDUCTED WITH ITS LATE STAR, ROBERT QUARRY

# BLOOD, BRIDES AND GIDEBURNS

BY TIM SULLIVAN

**I**N THE EARLY 1970S, WHEN THE WORLD HAD GONE PSYCHEDELIC BUT MONSTERS HAD GONE GOTHIC—SOME WOULD SAY STUFFY, WITH HAMMER HORRORS—**COUNT YORGA WAS HIP.** With his elegant wit, cake slodgers

for the clumsy moribids trying to stake him and fang-in-check persona, there had never been a vampire like him. He was very much the man who played him, Robert Quarry (1925–2006), one of the most underrated and unappreciated horror actors of all time thanks to a career in the genre that came late and ended early with the demise of Hammer/AVP/Arcade-type shockers in the '70s. Until his career faded in quantity, it made up for in quality, however, with memorable turns as Dr. *Pithecus Raza Agnes* (1972), *Super Joe* (1974), *Whodunnit* (1974) and, most memorably, his starring roles in *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970) and its sequel, *The Return of Count Yorga* (1971).

In the film, Yorga is a hip vamp living in a Victorian mansion outside of LA, where he conducts sessions in order to turn young women to become his brides. After he puts the bite on his gorgeous Doctor (Dorcas Ainsley) and Eliza (Jeddi Ling), Eliza's boyfriend Paul (Michael Macgregor) confronts the vampire and disappears, so Dorcas's boyfriend Michael (producer Michael Macgregor) as well help from Dr. Hayes (Rupa Perry) to rescue the girls and kill Yorga. In the sequel, he is resurrected, and now living as an orphanage, he seduces a new bride and continues to feed on the local bewitch.

This month, the Yorga films arrive on Blu-ray, thanks to Twilight Time, and I'm honored to provide audio commentary, along with fellow Quarry buddy David De Vito, and serve as curator of the special features. A giant of the genre, Quarry deserves

to be featured in the same breath as Kaelin, Lugosi, Cheney, Price, Gurney and Lee, so I was thrilled to get to know him during his final years and call him "Uncle Gabe." Our incredible begins on a hot Friday afternoon in North Hollywood, in 2004, when I sat him for an interview, part of which I'll share here.

## HOW DID YOU COME TO BE CAST AS COUNT YORGA?

I had been part of a theatre group in Los Angeles. I came from a theatre background, you know—studied with Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler... [After doing lots of theatre, I had been under contract to several film studios. They would contract you for a year, give you fencing lessons, horseback lessons—I had like I was being trained for the Olympics rather than an acting job. So I soon tired of that, and I was working in this little theatre group in the late '60s, kind of the studio system when one of its members, Michael Macgregor, came to me and told me he had decided to write a vampire movie, something like "Dracula." I said, "Well, I've got some good ideas, and he wanted to make it about vampires. He asked me if I would play the vampire, and the film was to be called *The Curse of Count Yorga*. I read the script, which was actually quite good, and asked him why he didn't just do a straight horror film. He was concerned about getting his money back, as it was all his own personal cash, and knew that studios were a sure sell. Well, I also knew that horror pictures were a sure sell, so we compromised. We would shoot the movie straight but he would also shoot additional softcore scenes that could be inserted later (unintended if the film turned out to be a disaster. That is why there are so many modern female characters such as the nurse and the secretary. Well, as it turned out, the film played tremendously well and so the decision was made to release it as a straight horror film.





IT WAS UNIQUE AT THE TIME BECAUSE OTHER THAN DARK SHADOWS, WHERE YOU HAD BARNABAS COLLINS, THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT A VAMPIRE WAS PORTRAYED IN A MODERN CONTEXT WITH SYMPATHETIC ATTRIBUTES.

Yes, that is true. And honestly, initially it was simply because the budget wouldn't allow for a period setting! ... Once Bob Kellner, who wrote and directed the first picture, realized we were constrained to modern Los Angeles, he embraced the concept as an idea. Bob certainly wrote a place for me to go with Yorga and I always want to credit him with that, but so many of the choices were mine. I feel that as an actor, you have to go for it. Just go for it! And I did. Flaming down the hills, wildly chasing after my misbehaving vampire brother—that showed the animal side of Yorga. But I also wanted him to have a human side. I wanted to show the human side of a non-human character. So I consistently realized and got more scenes where dialogue. Once the producer and director saw how I was playing Yorga after the first day of dailies, they let me run with it.

WHICH WAS SMART. I THINK OF ALL THOSE OTHER LEE REMICK MOVIES WHERE YOU HAVE THIS CAPABLE ACTOR WITH AN INCREDIBLE VOICE, BUT THE PRODUCTIONS DON'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT.

I had more dialogue in the first Yorga picture than Christopher Lee had in all his Dracula movies combined. Poor Christopher! They would have him just stand there with red contacts and whiskered face, lightning and fog lashed him. He had very little to do other than play the costume. Play the fangs. And that is what I think is wrong with so many of the "monsters" in movies at large. They are just men in masks with lenses going, "Goo!" ... You know the ones where one minute you're alive, next minute your dick's on the floor! [laughs] Anyway, with Yorga, I had the opportunity to show his charm, his elegance. I figure if you're lived 250 years, buddy, you better have a sense of culture and a sense of humor, or else you're not gonna make it through lunch!

YORGA IS MORE INTERESTING THAN THE HUMANS YOU FIND YOURSELF ROOTING FOR HIM AND NOT THE "HEROES."

That goes back to something from my acting training. Lee Strasberg taught

me that there are no villains—which means, the so-called villainous character doesn't think he's wrong at all. He truly believes he is right in all his actions. And that's how I played Yorga, an entity simply trying to do whatever he had to do, in order to continue to exist.

YORGA WAS INCREDIBLY CHARMATIC, LIKE A CULT LEADER IN HIS OWN RIGHT WITH ALL THOSE VAMPIRE WOMEN READY TO DO HIS BIDDING. I ALWAYS FELT THE MURDER OF MARINETTE HARTLEY'S FAMILY IN RETURN WAS DISTURBINGLY REMINISCENT OF THE SHARON TATE MURDERS.

Yes. That whole situation was very much on our minds when we made Yorga. Charles Manson was definitely in the consciousness, so much so that I truly decided to expand upon the theme in the film I did after the first Yorga. The Deathstalker. There was no basing around the bush there. I played a vampire, Charles Manson, who lived on a commune with a bunch of hippies, who he used to bring his victims. Good idea, terrible picture. And it indirectly led to the death of Count Yorga.

#### HOW WAS THAT?

Yorga's producer, Michael Maccausy, got all bent out of shape over Death-



Supper Bros. A costly cast for the sequel (and this, too). (R) Paul Mitchell Murphy, Erica Jodith Lahti and Yorga Robert Quarry (left) in a scene.

stalker. He said I was ripping off Tarantino and actually said me, for God's sake! He said I ripped off the British character by having the British character in the Deathstalker's subplot. I mean, please. Since Yorga's Deathstalker, the pattern, certain themes are always repeated over and over again. Every vampire needs a guy to lock the coffin! [laughs] Anyway, Maccausy was so bent out of shape, he never

forgot me. After did the second Yorga picture, which Michael directed, and he was so horrible to me I wasn't even to work with him again. He wouldn't let anyone else direct a Yorga picture so there you go.

#### WHAT A SHAME.

Yes. And I actually had a great idea for a third Yorga. [It was for him to return as a complete mess. You know, the second picture never explains how he returned from being destroyed in the first picture. He simply shows up and is asked, "How did you get here?" to which he replies, "I flew." Okay. Well, I figure after being killed with a hatchet at the end of Return, Yorga is reduced to sad and woe. So in the third one, someone rebuilds his house, does a Marmontesque blood ritual which splits up Yorga's return, and he returns—but he's completely broke and broken. Everything he had is gone, he's completely scared, so he turns to the streets. He lives in the sewers where he becomes king of the homeless addicts. Turns them all into vampires, and this can end bloody laugh on LA.

YOU SHOULDN'T REALLY ACT IN HORROR PICTURES AFTER AMANOUSSE FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

I suffered a huge setback in the early '80s. I was mugged and beaten by two men while getting out of my car one evening. Like a fool, I had let my SAG insurance lapse—knew to all you SAG members out there—so within a year my next egg was completely gone. I was broke, and sat in the best physical shop. Thank God for Fred Olen Ray, a very dear friend, who put me in nearly every one of his horror pictures through the '80s and into the '90s. Fred has pretty much single-handedly kept me alive.

THE

LATE-NITE  
ARCHIVEFEB. *Conceal the Dead*

by Paul Corio

**C**HAUD masks are responsible for some of the most iconic images of the last few decades of horror cinema history — Jason's hockey mask, Scream's Ghostface, Hannibal Lecter's muzzle, etc. These covers are usually used either to disguise their wearers or give a killer a blank, almost inhuman expression as they go about their bloody work (think of Michael Myers). But in classic horror, masks often served not to hide an identity, but to create one. From the *Phantom of the Opera* to face transplants to *Changeling* in *Cyber* Wilford's *Face*, masks usually indicated a fear of the horror within, including Vincent Price's '60s puting for *AP*, *The Thing* box, hiding Blum-ray the month from *Kino*.

Following the classic horror leads at *Phantom of the Opera* and Price's own turn as the sculptor in *House of Wax*, *The Thing* box also uses masks as a way to conceal disfigured faces. It's not Driven's character who dons a disguise, but his brother Sir Edward (Mads Mikkelsen), who was scarred and driven insane by an African witch doctor for undisclosed transgressions. Back in England, Julian (Price) keeps Edward hidden in the attic, but Edward hatches a plan to escape by taking his death. Things backfire and he's briefly buried alive before finding refuge



at the one later worn in Georges Méliès' *Witch Doctor* (1914).

In his groundbreaking work as a psychologist, Carl Jung developed the idea of the "persona," a kind of social mask we present to others to fit in. As part of this, Jung believed the side of ourselves we don't show to the world is a "shadow" made up of conscious and unconsciously repressed

thoughts and feelings — not only morally or socially deviant ideas, but also those that might put us in an unfavorable light. In simpler terms, crafting a persona couldn't be further away from donning a zombie mask on Halloween to creep out your peers. It's more like coming out of Old Navy with some new pants and copyfing as a well-adjusted human.

The term "persona" is rooted in the Latin term for theatrical masks, and it's no coincidence this is the precise disguise used by the white-suited horrors of the *Phantom of the Opera*, perhaps the most well-known and influential mask-wearing character in horror. In these films, as well as later iterations such as *The Thing* box, the persona and shadow are

made physical. The *Phantom* covers his ugly disfigurements (his shadow) with a white mask that allows him to interact with others (his persona). A similar, but mask-free dichotomy appears in screen adaptations of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, tapping into our own fears of our shadow, worries that repressed thoughts could surface and dictate our behaviors.

Heather Barker plays with the ideas of the mask brought forth in the *Phantom* films, as Edward first uses the red mask to move about London and evade without revealing his true, scarred face. But as Edward begins slaying the dreams of those who stand in his way, his mask becomes an image of fear, anticipating the way masks are used as either a protective face to cover up ugliness that to project terror as a lethal agent. In the case, Edward's inner shadow consumes his mask, eventually making it just as ugly to others as his camouflaged face behind it, and it's this transformation that makes the film worth watching.

*The Thing* box isn't a major film by any stretch, *Price*, *Lee* and *Heather* all did much better work in their careers. But it does stand as a highlight of the evolution of the meaning of masks in modern horror, a perfect illustration that, sometimes, a mask isn't even half as scary as what lays behind it. **D**



Hiding the horror shortly after the popular Roger Corman and Vincent Price collaborations based on the works of Edgar Allan Poe, *The Thing* box also takes to title from a Poe story, but features an entirely different plot. Rather than focusing on the notably Poe-derived live burial, the film provides a then-popular B-movie look at masks, with director Gordon Heaster having the deformed Edward don a striking crimson cover reminiscent

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# IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

*They're Satanists  
and They're Partying*  
by John W. Bowen

**H**ello, and welcome to A Very Special Halloween Episode of *Bowen's Basement*. Ken La Jemese and Paul Cougle's indispensable new book, *Satanic Power* (AMM58) has been available since the summer as it's a little late to try to make this column a companion piece, but it wasn't until just recently that my Kingston homeboy Tim Maggness sent me a link to the *Law Enforcement Guide to Satanism* video, a 1984 "educational video" that needs to be seen by cop culture analysts and irony junkies alike. You won't find ex-cop turned preacher Gordon Coulter and ex-Satanist turned preacher Eric Pryor among the contributors in Jemese and Cougle's book—they're a little too far down the pecking order. If anti-devil-worship crusaders were A-list celebrities, these dudes would be like Jeremy and Paul Shore. (Joeystyle Russell Crowe the time next year.)

Here is wisdom, via Coulter: "In satanic occultism, that which is good is bad and that which is bad is good." An ancient id propaganda line (in *Law Enforcement Guide* belongs on the same shelf of shame as *Reeler Madness* and *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography*—it's neither quite as peep nor quite as hilarious as the former nor as grating as the latter, but acting as a crude as a rubber and twice highly recommended for a gaggle of twos. (Notably an educational vid for Decembe-dating detectives.) It's hosted by Coulter (in a parade-of-horror over-the-top) and Pryor (portraying a sniffer that may have more sensitive nerves [traumatized] with a synth soundtrack that sounds like a PBS news show. It's all very authoritative 1985, but there's the kicker—the laughable score vid looks how new years later by which time dad worship hysteria was as passé as Ruchelle leg warmers.

Need proof that devil delinquency was still a thing in the garage era? These boys bring it. First, Pry-



or walks us through a San Francisco park infested by suspicious flesh-looking graffiti, an inverted cross (A very go-o-memo symbol," according to our expert), sandy raves, a Church of Satan logo and the member ID, identifying the Satanic Bible's Nine Satanic Statements. The 9 is a particular favorite, Pryor says, because "this is the way occultists tell each other, 'Hey, we're Satanists and we're partying.'"

We're 35 minutes into the 74-minute apoc before we get to mercury's favorite Berlin-dog-spoon ritual child abuse. The branding of "T.S.", a would-be "human abuse survivor," pretty much lost the whies she described being drugged upped down over a vat of acid while human and inbred body parts were tossed in. "Two million children go missing in the United States annually," intones the voice-over. So, basically enough missing recipients to populate a city the size of St. Louis? Had it think cops and parents alike would top over the little bastards more often.

According to Coulter, Satanists have a pretty jam-packed social calendar with upwards at twice weekly days and festivals annually. (He obviously learned random of the leaflet of these scenes

is enough to arouse suspicion that he's secretly joining to join in the member games, like Ted Cruz plotting a gay bar (January 17). Satanic Rituals—used, and end violent activities with female victims from seven to seventeen years of age, June 21 to 22. Summer Solstice—orgies, anal, oral, vaginal, very sex, very age. Oh, and apparently on Halloween, "Sex with demons is primarily an infant sex-act." Paul Morgan, you've got some sampling up to do for this year's book. Clearly devil worshippers are nothing if not a lot of love. I mean, sure, all that molester and blasphemous and disemblers and spade-down-child-dangle is some important shit, but Antichrist on an antichrist? When it comes to patching a swamp-dung-doodle, there takes make the Amish look like Jehovah's Witnesses or maybe the other way around. Hey, they're Satanists and they're partying.

Feeling sorry is an audience participation game. I've always agreed with Franklin Roosevelt about how devil bring the only thing we need to fear, but why fear it when we can profit from it? Fear sells goods and services, like churches, drive the stock market in both directions and generates votes better than anything else politicians can do in front of us. Apparently it's a worthy way to procure more funding for law enforcement too.

On that note, I'll wish you a safe and happy Halloween—not too safe. Now you'd best get the hell out of my basement and go see who's coming for your children. ☹



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# BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CARETUNO

**T**wo 1990s saw a huge surge in comics with several new publishers entering the field in hopes of cashing in. The rise of the direct market meant that many companies could easily bypass the Comics Code Authority and push the boundaries of sex, horror and violence like never before.

One of the most notorious books to take advantage of this newfound freedom was the zombie gore-fest *The Dead*, from Arrow Comics. Created and written by Ralph Griffith and Stuart Gier, *The Dead* debuted in 1993 as a loose sequel to the duo's 1980s indie series *Deathmetal* (see p 56). However, the new series would soon reintroduce its protozombie artist to a swirl of notoriety and controversy.

Graphic scenes of torture and genital mutilation were displayed on the covers, leading to an instant ban in Canada and the UK. Despite this, *The Dead* sold on, ultimately publishing seven issues from 1993 to 2011. Unfortunately, due to ownership and its sporadic schedule, many readers missed the initial run, a problem now rectified with the unrelenting of a new, bloodier-than-ever *Dead* collection.

"I think it's a good time to bring back independent comic books and sensibilities in general," says Derek Rook, artist and founder of Rough House Publishing. "We've lost many of our risk-takers and mavericks in print media. The motivation for creating a great comic book will never come from the desire for monetary gain, or status, or ego appealing. A true passionate creator has only one motivation to purge the filth in their soul and frantically explode it onto the printed page. That's it. That's what went into the creation of *The Dead* through 23 years and several incarnations."

Rook has worked closely with original creators Griffith and Gier, and several artists old and new on *The Dead Omnibus*. The collection features all seven original issues along with the never-before-published eighth issue, an additional new chapter wrapping up the decades-long story, a full-colour cover gallery, and several exclusive pin-ups commissioned specifically for the volume.

The stories themselves are set at the dawn of the zombie apocalypse, and focus on various groups of survivors who encounter unspeakable horrors. A family get-together goes drastically wrong, a team of EMTs respond to a critically injured accident, a camping party is crashed by some unwelcome guests - a babyfitter faces a night of indescribable terror, and a concert road trip is debauched by a cop fulfilling one nightmarish quota.

While the scenarios may sound familiar to any horror enthusiast, nothing can prepare you for the visual atrocities on display. Any and all body parts are fair game for a series that dared to publish a cover depicting a zombie chewing on a wife trashie-barn from a naked woman left spread-eagle on a bed, soaked in blood. The appeal of explicit gore in horror has been controversially debated for decades, but Rook believes it boils down to one simple fact:

"Horror satiates a cathartic desire (in non-violent people) to both be violent and deal with our fears of violence and represses in a 'virtual simulation' type of way, without consequence."



*The Dead Omnibus* Zombie gore before *The Walking Dead*

Rook is no stranger to explicit horror, having adapted Lucio Fier's *Zombie* into a graphic novel, which he also drew and published. And while he personally believes *The Dead* may not offer anything thematically new to a readership saturated by living dead trills, he nevertheless feels readers will be eager to learn about the book's well-deserved place in horror history.

"We see books like *Crossed* and *The Walking Dead* and say, 'Wow, what a breakthrough,' but in truth, there was a watershed that went back over two decades that combined the two beautifully into a microcosm that readers will be able to enjoy from a historic perspective. It's like loving *The Blair Witch Project* for being the original 'found-footage' film, then discovering that it was preceded by *Canadian Holocaust* a decade before."

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**Janey, the star** of *Zombie Tramp* sets her vengeful sights and baseball bat on an old-schoolmate who once raped her best friend, leading to her suicide. With his pregnant wife and unborn son as witnesses, she proceeds to strip, torture, read, tear, dismember and even penetrate the helpless jack before turning her attention to the rest of the family. Despite the many disturbing aspects of the story, Ben Mendelsohn's art makes it surprisingly palatable, giving up the twisted comedy elements that are a trademark of the book and character. The gore is also somewhat offset by a touching spiritual reunion between Janey and Tish, which also manages to shed a bit more background on Janey's origins and her ongoing quest for eternal rest.

**Three meth-addicted** teens have inadvertently sold their souls to the Devil in *The Infernal Pact*, resulting in them being part-time hosts to some destructive demonic forces. The group struggles to regulate its humanity, but for they

need to tackle a satanic uber pimp, little realizing that more demons, and even zombies, are waiting at the wings. Though a bit rough around the edges — characters could be better written and the art more polished — the book still has plenty of decadence, genital mutilation

and eye gouging on display. Unfortunately, the leads remain ciphers with only less, the lone female in the trio, making an impression. Until creator Joseph Paul Schiavone defines deeper into the group's personalities, this one remains difficult for readers to get fully invested in.

**Rise of the Blood Queen** starts off grandiously in a post-apocalyptic North America: a twisted Christian Holy Order atones, stretching children from the wasteland to build their numbers. Some kids are killed, and one young girl in particular is groomed as the City's basket, a plaything for racist priests. Eventually she rebels and problems herself Dean of the Order, awakening a large army and conducting genetic experiments for the purpose of creating the ultimate holy warrior: a hermaphrodite raised

Adams. Unfortunately, while the growth has been laid for some kind of satirical commentary on religion, sex and war, any attempts soon give way to pages and pages of Adams' slicing through the hapless wasteland population. It doesn't help that the book has six writers, all of who are competing but have wildly varying styles, giving the story a disjointed feel. This issue serves as a preview for the upcoming *Zombie Commander From Hell* series, so hopefully these problems will be ironed out and writer Steph Daniels can better explore some of the more interesting concepts on display.

**Avatar Press** has made a name for itself by creating some of the most gruesome comics on the market, and the *Crossed* series remains one of the most notorious. No holds are barred as an epidemic spreads throughout the world, causing victims to violently torture, rape, maim and/or kill the unprotected. While the attacks continue to be graphic, by the time you've read a handful of issues, the shock begins to wear a bit thin. And unlike *The Walking Dead*, the series has, to date, failed to create a cast of characters compelling enough to hold much interest. Take the latest issue, for example: a group of survivors take

in a couple of women — and debate whether or not to let them join the band. The dialogue is fine, the art is pretty and yet you can't help but feel that ultimately they're just being set up as fodder. But if all you're looking for is sex and gore, the series continues to hit its mark.

**Similarly, The Walking Dead** has never strayed away from graphic violence or disturbing imagery, but the book's true power lies in the fact that horrible things happen to characters we care about. Robert Kirkman invests time in fleshing out the players before finally whipping the flesh off them. This latest issue demonstrates this most effectively, and it's an exaggeration to say the playing field will be drastically changed yet again once the dust settles. Rick's fateful meeting with

Alpha, leader of the Whisperers — a band of survivors who dress up like walkers and will go to any means to remove — has clearly repercussions for a large segment of his group. Undoubtedly many readers will feel like they've been kicked hard in the gut — again. And not just because of the gruesome and familiar scenario left behind by the Whisperers, but because we know that Kirkman has created a world where no one is safe and every issue has the potential to be any character's last.



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# NINTH CIRCLE BOOKS

## MONSTER MASH: THE CREEPY, KIDDY MONSTER CRAZE IN AMERICA 1957-1972

Mark Voger  
Tennessee

A nostalgic ode to creepy and snively pop culture, *Monster Mash* is a fun book that may be the first comprehensive look at the mid-century horror fad. Author Mark Voger captures that period when monster kid madness swept North America following the release of the Shock Theater package that put dozens of classic horror films on TV in the late 1950s, bringing a little bit of fright into every lonely room. This energetic, heavily illustrated hardback lays out how a steady stream of TV show merchandise, toys, magazines, masks, board games, comics and other pop paraphernalia helped keep horror culture afloat.

Unlike, say, the precious collection showcased in Kirk Hammett's *For Much Honor*, *Business*, *Monster Mash* is more of a catalogue

perhaps the biggest slice of attention, including an interview with star Jonathan Frid. Additionally, the book seems to trail off when the author lost interest in monsters, rather than when the horror boom itself began to wane. But these are minor quibbles with an otherwise monster-aloof appreciation of that time when the spooky shenanigans of *Dracula*, *The Wolfman*, *The Mummy* and *Frankenstein's monster* all reigned largest over our imaginations.

PAUL CORBIE

## THE CONSULTANT

Bentley Little  
Connecticut

There's always that one guy at work that makes life a little more difficult, he might be incompetent, sort of weird or unreasonably mean. Although the horror genre often takes life's hardships and renders them into monsters and ghosts so we can feel some sort of catharsis, there's not a lot to speak for our universal man-to-man-at-work story in his hilarious and seriously dark novel *The Consultant*.

Doug Horne is a loving father and attentive husband, but everything in his life begins to crumble after his company he works for, CompWare, loses a promised merger. In a panic, CEO Austin Matthews hires a consulting firm called BFL, spearheaded by a man named Regus Pitoff. Only, as well as just about everyone else in the company, immediately distrusts Pitoff due to his slimy demeanor. He routinely makes inappropriate remarks ("Favorite position..."), visits people in their homes and loyally belittles lowly paraphernalia (a snow globe depicting an orgy), and puts increasingly invasive protocol into effect, removing any semblance of privacy from the workplace. But when people mysteriously become victims of freak accidents, the workers of CompWare start to fear for a lot more than their day jobs.

Bentley Little's ability to write sothe is as

taunting. Regus Pitoff is a well-constructed caricature, although he's embellished and outlandish, there's still plenty to grasp onto to make him realistic. Readers will inevitably find themselves thinking, "I know a guy like that," whether it's due to the way he creepily looks at workers' wives or his penchant for sending 300-plus emails in one sitting. Although the only real scares here are in how Little's satirical excesses into every scene by being an unbelievable creep, *The Consultant* is still a captivating, funny and necessary salvo for all of your how-is-that-guy-not-fired-yet feelings.

RICHELLE CHARNOY

## ZOMBIES: A CULTURAL HISTORY

Roger Luckhurst  
Baltimore, MD

Roger Luckhurst knows a lot about zombies. He knows a lot about many things, actually—the London-based modernist literature professor has penned several books on gothic literature and film, including academic treatments of such modern horror heavyweights as *Alien* and *The Shining*. What sets *Zombies: A Cultural History* apart from the multitude of zombie books out there is that Luckhurst knows that we know a lot about zombies too, he's well aware that his book covers well-trodden territory and so he sets his sights far beyond the scope of most historical accounts with a comprehensive look at the zombie's slow (sometimes fast) shambling through history to arrive in the present day as an omnipresent cultural icon.

To begin, Luckhurst traces the history of the zombie back to the earliest mentions by Western explorers who recorded their fascination with the folklore of the so-called savage. From the writings of Lafcadio Hearn in the 1890s to the oft-cited *Made Gwa* in the 1930s, he follows the zombie through the Haitian civil war to its emergence in American pulp fiction and cinema. After films such as *White Zombie* (1932) brought the monster to the West, our consciousness, and Jacques Tourneur's



also wanders off the beaten path to include more obscure offshoots—World War II, the atomic bomb, comic books, *Walt Disney's* *Beetlejuice* and others—celebrating with full-page spreads of toys, games, figures and other merchandise devoted to the big monster movie franchises.

While the book's focus is clearly its full-color photos and illustrations, Voger includes a handful of short but often interesting interviews to help contextualize his history, including *American* model kits box artist James Beane and *Star Trek* actor Big Daddy Ed Roth and George Beane. There are also interviews with personalities that have since passed away, such as *Pony J. Jackson* and *'Monster Mash'* singer Bobby Pickett.

On occasion, though, Voger's fandom tends to skew the coverage a bit towards his own favorites. *Monster Mash* puts significant emphasis on the TV side of things—not only *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family*, but *Dark Shadows* gets







*Zombies: A Cultural History: 1930's White Zombie*



*I Walked With a Zombie* elevated the subgenre to critical heights, movies such as *Zombies on Broadway* crashed them back into the B-movie bin where they continued to rot until what Luckhurst calls the "massification" of the zombie (inspiring Romero and Russo's infamous twist that grouped the dead into a pack, easily beaten when alone but extremely dangerous in numbers). Then we arrive at the zombie renaissance of the 1990s that thrust the creature's new global reach into video games, television, advertising and even public policy. Special care is taken throughout to note the mass-cultural factors (such as the economy, for example, or political tensions or technological advancements) that enabled the zombie to become a multi-platform, and multi-billion-dollar, industry.

True to its premise, *Zombies* is an exhaustive account of the living dead, and can offer even the most seasoned zombie aficionado a lesson or two. The tone is light for such a rigorous academic treatment, even funny at times, and Luckhurst's book may well be the definitive account of the zombie phenomenon, but let's face it: anyone seriously interested in the topic of zombies already has entire shelves of their library devoted to it. Zombies have gotten so mainstream that the zombie super-nerd who would have eaten this book up 10 years ago has already exhausted her interest in these monsters (who, in 2015, have themselves exhausted their subversive edge). If somehow you haven't satiated your appetite for academic discourse on rotters, Luckhurst's cultural history is what you're looking for. For everyone else, it's yesterday's news.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

## BEST BRITISH HORROR 2015

Johnny Harris, ed.  
Salt Publishing

If you like your horror not really horrific but so understated and ambiguous that it barely merits the label, you will probably find things to like in *Best British Horror 2015*, the second volume of the new anthology series edited by Johnny Harris, for Salt Publishing. Sadly, gone are the days of nasty British drivel in a Clive Barker, or at least James Herbert, bed the trouble is that the all-too-cynical "horror" adopted for this collection is also very distant from masters of atmospheric suggestiveness such as Ramsey Campbell and Roger Corman (see: *FMP 157*), both

## THE GRIM READER

### BLACKBLOW

Martin Gwynne  
Avalon Publishing



Editor, critic and occasional Ace Wagon contributor Martin Gwynne sheds bright light on *Blackblow*. Telling is Gwynne's expertise of writing on the influential British classic that has fascinated horror fans for over 50 years. Best and readable (albeit a bit terse), it's a handy crash course in the film's "back" story and context, and a great resource for any horror fan looking to take a peek under the hood.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

### SERVE

Vicki Performance  
Gallery Books



Ever wonder what a road trip with *Agnes* would be like? You're in luck: just as Kim and her perfect fiancé Daniel leave Vegas for the July 4th holiday, he's kidnapped, and they're both forced to play along with a fiendish stranger's games to win back their freedom. *Serve* is a fast, giddy, though ultimately unremarkable serving of indie candy.

GEORGE CHAMBERS

### FINDERS KEEPERS

Stephen King  
Bantam



In Stephen King's sequel to *Mr. Murderer*, Bill Dwyer discovers that a boy is attempting to put the unpublished manuscripts of a murdered author. It's a fresh take on the "crime gone wrong" story, particularly with red crimes being focused around libraries.

However, the random supernatural ending supports this trilogy is going somewhere completely different, of course, we'll have to wait until the last book to find out. Highly recommended.

BRETT WICKELL



GROWING DARK  
Christopher Truitt

With projects where it's possible that the creator really cared for what he or she was making, it's easy to be charmed and disarmed. Growing Dark Christopher Truitt's last letter to everything

dark and spooky, whether it be roots to 19th-century horror or dance-theatrical horror. Truitt's writing might not be particularly complex or poetic, but his knack for writing specifically, my love, what he's making this book story collection a masterpiece.

CELESTE CHAMBER

WITH RAGE MASTER, WEREWOLVES TEAR THEIR WAY INTO EARTHLING PUBLICATIONS' LONG-RUNNING HALLOWEEN SERIES

# Red in Tooth and Claw

BY MONICA S. KLEIDER

**WACK-OR-TREAT? TACK-OR-TREAT? GIVE US SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT!** IF YOU GORGE UP HORROR STORIES LIKE CANDY, EARTHLING PUBLICATIONS' HALLOWEEN SERIES strives to ensure you get something good to sink your teeth into each and every year. Curated by oversubeditor Paul Miller, it unofficially kicked off back in 2004 with a limited-to-10,000-copies handmade hardcover of Glen Hirshberg's haunted house novella *Mr. Dark's Carnival*, and has in the ensuing decade published works in much larger runs by such genre

mainstays as James A. Moore (*Blood Red*), Conrad Williams (*The Underslept*), Peter Crowther (*By Blood Dark*) and Gary Middleton (*The Bones of Now*).

"Horror has been my favorite literary genre since I first read Poe and Lovecraft when I was nine years old, [and] Halloween has always been my favorite holiday," says Miller of the impetus behind the Halloween Series. "A while back, I started a tradition of reading a classic horror or dark fantasy novel during the month of October to celebrate the holiday — *Simon's Lot*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, etc. About a dozen years ago, I thought, why not publish such a novel each year? Eleven years is later, I'm pleased to say I'm still doing this line of books, which has typically been very well received."

This year's volume, *Rage Master*, comes courtesy of celebrated British author Simon Clark and offers up a wildly original take on the traditional werewolf mythos. The tale, told through a combination of first-person narrative and excerpts from military correspondence, judicial testimony and other documents, tells of a delving into of "Dog-Warlocks." This evolutionary offshoot of Norse apes could blend in with modern humans were it not for their broader jaws and other mildly wolf-like features, never mind their propensity for a brief, explosively scarring tooth-crafted period they call "the Rage." As a result, they're being hunted by the human authorities who wish to eradicate their species once and for all.

"Right from the start, when Paul and I were discussing what kind of story I should write, we agreed I should aim for the raw, violent power of

*Steel Dawn* — heads-down my most popular novel as of late," says Clark. "Werres: *Blood Crazy* features zombie-like horror, we agreed that *Rage Master* should be my take on werewolves. I also wanted to write about what it's like to be an outsider in society. The 'werewolves' in *Rage Master* are refugees of sorts, hunting for a safe place to live, yet wherever they find the masses, their unique nature triggers violence and slaughter. *Rage Master* is most definitely red in tooth and claw."

The book is also interesting because, despite the bloodshed the Rago can bring about, it pits reader sympathies squarely in the Dog-Head camp, with the military and mercenaries falling into the do-facto role of the monsters — classic hunters endlessly bolstered by our culture of surveillance. After all, Kavalik and Sebastian, the two Dog-Heads at the center of the narrative, want nothing more than to stop feeding and perhaps even settle down into a nice human kind of existence.

Miller plans the Halloween Series (which can be purchased from earthlingpub.com) one to two years in advance, in order to leave plenty of time for the authors to write and for him to have the book proofed, designed, illustrated and published. This means that 2016's edition — which will feature a story from another British author, Sarah Piebrough (*The Death Mouse*) — is already well underway. ("I'll be missing an early-fall/early-October release for this series!" Miller admits.)

As for why *Rage Master* and the series' other books deserve a place on your bookshelf, for Clark, it's all about Miller's unwavering love for the genre and the editors he produces.

"I first worked with Paul back in 2000 when he produced his first book, which was *Simon Clark: A Working Bibliography*," Clark explains. "He has an absolutely intense devotion to detail. He takes so much care to ensure every aspect of the book is perfect. I returned to Earthling again [in 2003] when I co-edited *Exorcising Anger* with Tim Leiben. Again, Paul produced a beautiful book that collectors will cherish. Of course, I jumped at the chance of writing *Rage Master* for him."



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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES HANNA  
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# LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

BY VANDERBILT AND VICTORIA

**D**oeth isn't any easier to accept despite our propensity to harbor them to face it head-on in our entertainment. When it strikes, it gets as just as effectively as anyone else. It is added "the great equalizer," as someone once said.

For me, the death of a creator — especially one stolen from us in his or her prime — feels particularly deep. I mourn, after all, not only for the person, but for the stories that they'll never get to tell us. It feels like being deeply robbed.

These are all things I've thought about in the wake of author Tom Pollock's death this past summer, following his battle with brain cancer. I also thought about how kind and supportive he was when I totally met him as a brightly green genre journalist. I was pretty much a nobody back then, but he never treated me that way. Not only was he one of the first authors I interviewed for *Now Magazine* (in 2004), but when I later met him at one of the first World Horror Conventions I attended, he took me under his wing, introduced me to others in the biz and even said some very generous words about my writing after I dared to get up and read during the con's poetry open mic (some background, I was a poet before a journalist). I never forgot that, and indeed Tom's kindness to horror newcomers was a theme that came up again and again as writers and readers mourned his July 11 passing.

But apart from being one of the good guys, he was also a solid-blowny good writer who spread his wings far beyond our beloved genre. While his Southern Gothic horror novel *A Choir of All Children* (2008) remains my favorite work of his, he also wrote poems, fiction, fiction, sci-fi, fantasy and non-fiction, and even has a couple sci-fi editing credits to his name. Over the course of his career, he penned more than two dozen novels and many, many short stories. He took home the Bram Stoker Award four times (out of seven nominations) and won the International Thriller Writers Award twice.

Yes, in Tom we lost a genuine literary powerhouse. If you haven't yet caught on to his work, please do, because I can't think of any better way to honor his memory than to keep his writing alive and in circulation for the generations to come.

We miss you, Tom. Thanks for all the stories.

MOBICA S. KOSTELER



WINNERS: (L-R) Adam Cooper, Winston E. Jacobs, Gaby Goodfriend, Brian Keweenaw, John Skipp, Tom Pollock, and Michelle Soule-Pollock



of whom had stories in the first volume but are sadly missing from this one.

Solid stories in this selection are, in order of not-too-boredom: "The Night Porter" by R.B. Russell, a fine, unpredictable tale of a strange woman who keeps bringing young, apparently intoxicated escorts to a hotel room, from which they vanish into thin air; "Private Ambulance" by Simon Kerr Unsworth, a chilling, if thin and way too simple story of a ghost's role in a morgue car; "Alchemist" by Mark Samuels is, surprisingly, not about the most famous Brit alchemist, the Great Beast of that name, but about a family home, a nearby graveyard and a little boy who makes some new, ghastly friends there, finally, there's "Learning the Language" by John Llewellyn Probert, a solid piece of regional terror that tells us that "Wales is not only older than England. There are some who believe it to be the place where life first sprang from on this planet." To be born Welsh is to be born not just privileged, but to be born into an ancestry that leads back to a time before man, before the mammals that led to the development of man.

The loss said about the rest, the better.

Perhaps 2014 was a bad year for British horror, but if these mostly forgettable tales are representatives of "the best," are shudders to imagine what the average ones are like.

DEAN DOUGLASS

## DAY FOUR

Simon Lotz

Little, Brown and Company

With horror heavyweights such as Stephen King praising Simon Lotz's previous novel *The Wreck*, *Day Four* has some big, spooky shoes to fill. Although *Day Four* is technically a sequel to *The Wreck*, one does not need to read the former to enjoy the latter, in spite of the suggestion in the numerical title: *Day Four* stands within the same universe as its predecessor, and contains many similar characters, yet can stand alone due to its self-contained narrative.

The story follows a group of survivors stranded on a cruise ship that has mysteriously stopped moving after four days of travel. The narrative rolls out in the different but interrelated story arcs of the main characters. Middle, the scientist to a charlatan medium named Caline who performed for the passengers, Xavier, a hot-headed blogger who wants to expose Caline as a fraud, Althea, a foul-mouthed ship worker; Gary, the main antagonist, a slimy, perverted man with an obsession for stalking the "outsider" in any given group of women, Devin, part of the scanty staff, Helen and Elise, two elderly persons who want a last hurrah before they each commit suicide, and a doctor named Jesse. Supplies begin to run short, and to make matters worse, increasingly strange and frightening circumstances arise. Among them, Caline has seemingly obtained an actual supernatural gift after falling into a catatonic stupor, passengers exchange stories about seeing apparitions floating around the deck, and a girl has been found dead.

*Day Four* is a very slowly paced novel, with more emphasis on character development than plot. Although this should open up the opportunity for the author to build atmosphere and create a sense of dread, if instead feels dull and disengaging. Lotz presents an age-old tale of how society would crumble if humans were left to their own devices, a tried storyline in its own right, but when told through the eyes of too many flat characters, it's hard to invest in the narrative. The novel's large cast would have greatly benefited from having their own unique voices, as it is, the only thing that really differentiates them from one another is a series of heavy-handed one-liners, such as Althea's use of the word "lack-arsed."

*The Wreck* may be regarded as Lotz's thrilling triumph, but consider if ill-advised to board this infernal cruise ship.

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# THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY PULLIN

THIS MONTH: **ED REPKA'S MARTIANS AND METAL WASCOTS**

**C**rowned the "King of Thrash Metal Art," Ed Repka's been bleeding our eyeballs for decades with his apocalyptic visions and vibrant colour palettes. He's painted scores of magazine and album covers, but he's perhaps best known as Megadeth's go-to artist, visualizing Dave Mustaine's conceptual vision, while defining the band's skeletal mascot, Vic Rattlehead. Repka mostly works as a traditional painter, a rare breed in the illustration industry these days where tablet pens have replaced brushes. He also doubles as Art Director for MEGA Toys, designing, sculpting and developing its line of licensed horror collectibles, including painting prototypes for the company's action figures, Headbangers and giftware lines, plus art directing sculptors, designing packaging and creating action figure box sets, such as the one for Freddy vs. Jason. I caught up with Repka as he was putting the final touches on his latest Martian illustration for Tipper's *Mars Attacks* Deception trading card series.

*Are you entirely traditional in your method these days?*

Most of my work for CD covers is digitally painted. I scan in a hand-drawn image and paint over it as I would with real paint. I'm doing totally traditional paintings for *Mars Attacks* because it's appropriate to the pulp aesthetic of the series. I find it hard to give up traditional paint entirely but deadlines often require going digital.

*I've heard some conflicting stories on who came up with Vic Rattlehead. What's the story behind him?*

It was first credited to Sean Smithson who was thanked for the "conceptual birth of Vic Rattlehead" in the *Peace Sells* thank you section. So it looks like the concept was his. As I understood it, Dave Mustaine was in correspondence with Sean, a fan artist, and asked him to design (unpaid) a kind of cast-of-arms based upon the lyrics to "Skull Beneath the Skin." I believe this art was eventually to be used on *Killing Is My Business*, but Relativity Records didn't want it and

opted for a photo illustration cover. When I was hired to paint the *Peace Sells* cover, they showed me a T-shirt with the Vic cast-of-arms on it. It was crude and not very skull-like, but [that] the basic elements. I assume this was Sean's work and the so-called "lost" art. I wouldn't call that a character but, with that as my model, I designed the character and gave it my trademark bulbous head, different kind of mouth hooks, ear caps and visor. Dave liked my illustration and wanted me to do the next cover.

*How did you evolve Vic into a mascot for the band?*

It was in the *Peace Sells* illustration that, for the first time, Vic became a real character with a personality. I tried to infuse some cockiness into Vic's body language. After *Peace Sells*, I painted a series of posters and then T-shirts for Megadeth's merchandise, *Brooklyn*. There are around twenty pieces. I had total freedom on those, being given only a direction in which to move. It was through these images that I kept

developing the character of Vic. I decided he could change size, would wear different clothing, but retain the black business suit as the main costume. I also cast him net as a villain but as the anti-hero. I got to develop a character over several years that has become a part of the pop-culture lexicon.





*What are some of the terrible things you're designing for the new Mars Attacks series?*

I designed the look of the eco-human Martian Moa. These new characters, first introduced in the invasion ad, were originally described as mutated zombie-like creatures in ragged clothing. I suggested that they should wear Martian-provided clothing and came up with the green overalls. I loved their look on the closet monitor from *The Drive That Wouldn't Die* and gave them the "caller of skeletons," from which they are controlled by the Martians. My "Murder at Midnight" card features the Rebel Sonny, which is based on a giant robot featured in an initial series card concept sketch by Wally Wood. My art follows the design generally and fixes it out a lot more. I had to design the Sarcor Cyclops, Brain Washing Holmdicks, Science Lab Interiors and devices, Human Agnents (kibernet), etc. I tried to keep all my Martian tech designs close to the '50s Wally Wood sci-fi look. This gives the Martians technology an arcane alien look.

*It looks like they're introducing some new characters and adding for Mars Attacks: Occupation. Is there a formula to the Mars Attacks universe that Topps wants you to adhere to, or do they give you free reign on the designs?*

The majority of the character designs are in the initial series. When initiating the invasion-related series, Topps took a look at those cards and the various inconsistent portrayals of the Martians and tried to make some logical sense of it and



update it. For example, the head-crabbed Martian became yet another species of Martian but a "Science Division" Martian with a tentacle filter mask. There is an overall design plan but the artists are not strictly held to it and are free to embellish or edit.

*What sorts of things do you look for in a project? Do you turn any offers down due to content? For being too grotesque, perhaps?*

I get a lot of requests for cover designs and I have to turn down a lot of it but not for those reasons. The grotesque and out-there concepts are the ones I look for. I have work down if it is boring. A lot of the things bonds want are just incredibly repetitive or safe. I recently did a cover for Gruesome, the Death Parade band. That was fun. I got to do some sci-fi concepts having a snack. I don't like to do anti-religious work. They



are not the creepy and that whole thing is cliché at this point. The corporate morality is the evil today. It also helps if I get to create a cool monster or character for a cover.

*Any cool projects you can give us a sneak at?* Right now I'm overloaded with CD cover assignments, a new cover for Solidist Angels, Gruesome and several other new bands. When I get done, I plan to start working on my book again. This will be a big book with all my art and the behind-the-scenes story of its creation.

*For more, visit [exclusives.digitart.com](http://exclusives.digitart.com)*



# THE GORE MET

MENU: A DISTASTEFUL DISH AND SOME SEASONAL FARE

**D**evil horseshow of women is a pernicious and serious issue. While perhaps simplifying things, women are inevitably reduced to one of two personae: that they're a challenge to male dominance or that their sexuality is a commodity to be possessed.

The *Goremetal* fiasco last year is an egregious example of the latter. Prominent women critical of the misogyny inherent in video games and the industry were subjected to an anonymous and coordinated campaign to silence them through threats of rape and murder.

Similarly, "crawling" is a term that describes cyber-stalking women through their social media activity. Matthew Green chose to address this in his 2012 film *Creeper*, released last month on DVD by Unrated Films. In it, Tracy (Olivia Thirlby) and Gilly (Johanna Marrow) are best of friends, housed on a platform called Connectbook and plot with their like-minded friends to come out a creeper and humiliate him online. They target Jerry (Darryl Felder), a male Iraq war vet, non-dramatic cyber-lurker, anti-psychiatric medication, and regularly gather YouTube footage to put him through a series of increasingly humiliating tasks, revealing him with flashes of violence and promises of sexual possibilities. Tracy and Gilly get so caught up in the thrill of dominating Jerry that they decide to kill him, but their attempt goes awry and he escapes. A year later, in the face of psychosis, he returns for revenge.

Beside the female-heavy cast, *Creeper* won't see any female awards; the women are depicted as vain, self-absorbed and creatively craft. In other words, they're ladies who deserve to die. But that's not the only problematic aspect of *Creeper*: Smart phones and laptops do not mix with the first film damage and blow-out. Toxicolous palette in the first half of the film, and the GF enhancements to the practical gore effects in the second half will almost assuredly generate farts. So, as a throwback to cheap '70s exploitation, *Creeper* delivers the boobs and blood (and a subtle scardy). As a vehicle to subvert



the hackneyed depiction of women in horror films though, it's a missed opportunity.

So why move on to something even less fun that arrives just in time for Halloween, the increasingly fun season-themed anthology, *Volumes of Blood*? For it, five directors each contributed a short, all shot within the confines of the same public library.

The film opens with a direct homage to *Friday the 13th*, which is revealed to be a film that a psychology student is watching on his phone during a lecture on urban legends. The class gives an assignment to come up with urban legends of their own, so four friends meet in the library on All Hallows' Eve to tell each other their stories...

Triffic author John Kenneth Muir (Terror Television) makes his directorial debut with *A Little Pick Me Up*, an EC Comics-type sketch about a bechuggled student and a mysterious salesman with a new energy drink guaranteed to blow your head off. It's smart and righteously gory!

Then there's director P.J. Barker's Japanese-style ghost story featuring a Korean working after hours and a book engraver that refuses to stay closed.

EC Comics reissues again in Jakob Tarkenton's *13 After Midnight*. In it, a girl gets off going to her barman-swilling boyfriend's Halloween party to finish an assignment in the library, only to find herself locked inside with a horrible beast.

The longest of the bunch is Thomas Miller's deadly serious *Encyclopedia Scabiosa*, in which a loner who is guilt-ridden after her ex-boyfriend's suicide finds an old book of arcane spells and rituals among the returns. If the book is blessed and the name of a deceased loved one spoken, that person will return from the grave. Better say "The Monkey's Paw", the disgraced line appears, but he's not looking for love.

And finally, the glue that binds the film — and provides the final twist, is Lee Vernon's *Ward's a Whop*. Producer and writing contributor P.J. Stiles steps in front of the camera to play an experienced director on the set of a horror film plagued by several masked killers.

*Volumes of Blood* is a perfect example of a film where dedication to craft trumps budgetary constraints. Sure, almost the entire film was shot and set in one location, but it looks fantastic and moves along at a top pace. There's a variety of tones in the stories and, while each filmmaker took an individual approach to his segment, there's a remarkable consistency to the whole. And there are exploding heads, and sporting injuries, and scary inmates and chaotic mayhem!

*Volumes of Blood* will hit DVD next year and is currently playing festivals, so watch it if you can! It's just the right kind of horror movie Halloweening to make up for the cinematic poison apples.





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# AUDIO DROME

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★★★★★ WINDMILL  
★★★★ STUNT  
★★★ M.A.L.  
★★★ SMALL  
★★★★★ BOY IN THE BOAT

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## WICKED CITY

Dharma Shop

From Los Vics

Tiger Lab, a new label focused on serious vinyl soundtracks, goes horror-core for its first release, 1987's *Wicked City: Dharma Shop*, a synth-artist from the late 70s/early 80s provides a varied, often trippy score that is part dark ambient atmosphere, part '80s new wave/punk and part jazz-funk. Without a listening theme, it's all over the place, yet oddly enough, the constant intrusions of sound effects and quirk shifts in direction don't detract from its listenability — one can imagine the bass lines and retro synths fueling any number of sleazebars or monster flicks. The re-mastering of *Wicked City* is superb, resulting in huge, pulsating sounds that pull you into the movie's world of shape-shifters and secret police. Highly recommended for '80s horror devotees. **3.5/5** ★★



## FRIDAY THE 13TH

Part II

Harry Manfredini

Wendy Records

Just as the makers of *Friday the 13th* had no idea how much interest the movie would generate, composer Harry Manfredini surely had no idea that one day, Part II would receive a deluxe vinyl pressing. '82, the score lifts heavily from Psycho and Jaws, and it's more a collection of effects than a structured piece, but it's also an unrelentingly tense string-based roller-coaster ride of quiet lulls and erupting jump scares. Today's fans know these films like the back of their pockets, so they'll enjoy listening to the action play out, recognizing specific bits as the wicker-curse Woodwork has closed up the original masters for this pressing, and while the sound quality is mostly fine, there are a couple of pops. Rich Kelly provides cassette-style original artwork, with a couple of ingenious nods to the film.

mid-ception double replacement  
**3.5/5** ★★



## PIECES

Various

Wendy Records

Wendy Records

We all love Pieces, but it's one of the most stupid movies ever made and, appropriately, its "soundtrack" is little more than a compilation of tracks from other movies, probably explaining why it was never released until now. Opening heavy rock song "Up Country" sounds strange on a horror soundtrack, particularly leading into the uncharacteristically sexy Fabio from lounge number "Cachet Maitre" (both from *Seven Days in May*). From here, the soundtrack gets into more typical dark keyboards with tracks taken from the Ecce French comedy *Taxi Guit*, Abba's *Wanted*, and King of Saxons' its unimpressive progging, including the malle puzzle from the film, the grindhouse-style trailer, a sticker stating that it's "pressed on affordable 140 gram black vinyl" and a hilariously long run-out etching. Pieces might be the most unnecessary horror soundtrack to have on vinyl, but at least it's by a label that gets it. **3.5/5** ★★

retro horror soundtracks and with a number of releases under its belt, the group takes a big step forward on the split LP. While the production is a bit at times and some melodies are very basic, the record has its moments when mixing 2-movie sci-fi spooky sounds with intense prog rock. Both "Pieces Surround" and "Sounds from the Shroud Wall" layer multiple tracks achieving a hypnotic, absorbing warmth that places the Withers near their peers, albeit they're no Zombi or Gable. The other side of the record features horror punk like Mangled Dead, a very DIY sounding group of dead leaders playing ultra-basic punk rock tunes about the usual monsters and madmen complete with a vocalist moaning like a well-mixed Danzig. Combining two disparate genres on one record doesn't work here, but horror soundtrack punk gets the nod. This represents Withers of Mars' best effort to date. **3.5/5** ★★



## UNCLE ACID AND THE DEADBEATS

The Night Creeper

Raw Acid Records

In a heavy music landscape where the word "cult" gets tossed around incessantly, Britain's Uncle Acid and the Deadbeats are the real deal. On their fourth album *The Night Creeper*, the heavily mysterious quartet takes its love of Hammer horror, 60s pop melodies and proto-metal riffs and expands them into a dark noir tale of madness. It begins as a grimy pulp novel about an unsettling homeless creeper, before taking on a new dimension as a giallo slasher. Black Sabbath and Gwyneth Herbert permeate the songs, with a direct Whitehouse Ash/Satan Carving presence in "Yellow Moon" and Electric Wizard levels of heaviness on "Waiting for Blood."

## ZEMBI

Shape Shift

Raw Acid Records

Brian Moore and A.E. Roman's new Zombi album draws heavily from the instrumental sounds of Goblin, Tangerine Dream and Fabio Frizzi (and maybe a little Stromae Yarnholed), but each track is distinct in both design and tone making *Shape Shift* feel like a newly discovered prog-rock concept album from the early 1980s. Roman's drums and Moore's electric bass showcase their obvious performance skills, but then there's the subtleties in other instrumentation and a crazy fidelity to specific synth moments that take tracks beyond their initial length (back to "Ghosts II" which is heavily cyclical at nearly three minutes). Yet it all works, as drums, bass, electric guitar, gyrating synths and ethereal vocals induce a trance state, especially the multi-layered "Interweave" with its wandering cellos and fat, drifty synth chords. There's no doubt *Shape Shift* is made for a live — if not vinyl — experience. It's melting music that needs to be played loud. **3.5/5** ★★



## WITCHES OF MARS / THE MANGLED DEAD

Witches of Mars vs. The Mangled Dead

Power Records

Witches of Mars is another electronic act that draws inspiration from

and "Melody Lane." Closer "Slow Death" is exactly that: an unhinged burn that descends into the noisy unknown. How the story ends is unimportant; the real enjoyment comes with revealing *The Night Creeps* again and again. **B.B.B.** CR



## GHOST

*Immunology*

Loose-Vibe Satanism

At this point Ghost's following is more than just a cult: it's practically a doctrine, so a new album meets big expectations. Although the band claims *Immunology* is a futuristic concept record, the sound is heavily rooted in the past, with most songs calling out '60s psychedelia and '70s rock through the use of organ, sugar-sweet vocals and sing-along melodies. At the same time, there's an effort to bring back the heavy, notably on "Lovers Are Another 'From the Penitentiary to the Pit," and the chap riffs of "Mummy Dirt." Nothing with Ghost is one-dimensional so expect sick song to be layered in instrumentation and damps, and songwriting that runs between gash-blowing devil metal to soft rock ballads — sometimes at the same time, if *Immunology* was Ghost's doublet introduction of psychedelic experimentation they'd make an attempt at making it work in a more metallic context. This probably isn't Ghost's best record yet, but it's epic enough to bang one follower into the fold. **B.B.B.** AOL



## VHS

80-Fi Horror

Horror Pts. 60: Death Productions  
80-Fi Horror showcases a straight allegiance to a bygone decade re-

viewed by horror trends worldwide. These Thunder Bay, Ontario, dreary guitar sound like someone carving a tombstone (with a back axe or power sander) and they're refreshingly apt to denigrate their layman with a Repulsion/Vulgaris wrap, rather than the usual Coddie Monster trick. The subject matter is wonderfully obscure, sure. "When Sleeping Bag Starts Toss" confuses me of Jesus's most infamous kills and we all know which Texas Chainsaw sequel features "The Tainted Child is Toss," but where was the last time you heard a song based on Chopping Meat or Killer Whores? **B.B.B.** GT



## GNEW THEIR TONGUES

*Allyou of Loping Throats*

Classic Beat

After a three-year absence, Gnew Their Tongues is back with another named *Allyou* a back with another harmonizing full-length, and while the audio format is easier to digest an *Allyou* of *Loping Throats*, there are some subtle changes in the band's attempts to socken True, the same consistent parts are all there — symphonic pomp, rising black metal howls, electronic bronzes and eerie riffs-in-the-wilderness — but the overall demeanor has been scaled back, and in hiding some of the horror from view, the results are all the more terrifying. Always distancing and occasionally even beautiful, the album lurches between repeating textures ("Through Flesh"), striking abhorrence ("From the Black Mouth of Spide") and elegant grace ("Up into the Heavens Down into the Gates of Hell"), ultimately conjuring to form something that is unsettling, horrific and utterly enveloping. **B.B.B.** AD



# LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

In August we were blessed with *Melior*, the third full-length from Swedish satanic cult Ghost. As Loma Vials, it's been the following the band's meteoric rise in popularity, something that starts to derive from its commitment to secret identities, eccentric demonic stage costumes and, most importantly, a continually evolving sound that combines '60s psychedelic rock and classic heavy metal in a way that appeals to a huge cross-section of people. I checked in with one of the *Melior* Ghosts to find out more about the band's latest musical incarnation.



## WHAT IS THE CONCEPT FOR *MELIOR*?

Visually, when you are playing occult-oriented rock music, you automatically end up in some sort of repressed, gothic, spider-web, gothic world — which I love — but we've always thought that if we're going to be sustainable we need more ways to point the world in a down rock format. Quite early on we had the idea that sooner or later it would be cool if we made a futuristic album.

## HOW DOES THE ALBUM FIT WITH PREVIOUS UPS AND DOWNS AND INVESTIGATIONS?

Literally, the idea on *Melior* was to juxtapose our last album *Immunology*, where that album was about the presence of Satan, this one is about the absence of God. In the Western world we live in, we have thrown the idea of gods and religious institutions overboard. So great, we should be happier than ever but still we are building the Tower of Babel reaching up to the sky in every city. Most people are eating medicine because we are so lost and so unhappy. *Melior* is definitely reflecting on the issue that we should be on the top of our world right now but we're not. This record is about the future, modern world, without any God.

## GNEW GHOST'S FANTASTIC IMAGERY: CLASSIC ROCK SOUND AND MELIOR'S KINSHIP. IT'S UNEXPECTED TO TAKE SUCH A MODERN TURN.

I think it's becoming more clear what we've always been about. *Spice Encyclopedia* was more straightforward Satanism, but I have always seen Ghost as more about real life than superstition. "Eccoborn" was the first song we ever wrote. It tells the tale [of] a woman who was raped and accused of witchcraft in the Middle Ages because she was pretty. So that song is about superstition, but that sort of thing still happens. We aren't burning people at the stake, but girls and boys are being defamed on Facebook. Some people actually commit suicide. It's horrible how we come up with new ways to look with each other. Religion is definitely one of the older arts of tormenting each other. That's what Ghost is about. We are simulating religion while at the same time trying to reach that euphoric feeling you can achieve through faith and devotion.

JARON VAN LIPTON

CADABRA RECORDS LAUNCHES WITH **WHERE IS ABBY?** & OTHER TALES,  
A LAVISH LP OF NEW YORK CITY-CENTRED STORIES FROM  
WRITER AND ILLUSTRATOR LEE BROWN COYE

# NYC HAUNTED

by PAUL CORIPE

**I**F YOU'VE EVER SAT AROUND A CAMPFIRE WITH A SEASONED STORYTELLER SPINNING A GHOST TALE, YOU KNOW THE POWER OF

the oral tradition to speak, scare and otherwise shock you. Cadabra Records, a new label specialising in creepy spoken word albums, hopes to replicate that feeling right on your home front with its debut release *Where Is Abby? & Other Tales*, featuring a handful of stories by renowned artist and author Lee Brown Coye (1907–1981). It's a release that aims to bring renewed legitimacy to a subgenre too often associated with budget Halloween LPs featuring corny sound effects and hopscotch stories.

"The spoken art is very under-appreciated," says Jonathan Denison, founder of the Syracuse-based label. "They provide another dimension of the written story. Listening to a spoken word record on vinyl should be treated as an experience, a way to be channelled into another world."

Like character monologues in a film, spoken word albums such as *Where Is Abby?* offer more than someone simply reading a text; they are better thought of as distinct performances, for which the reader brings the written word to life with dramatic flourishes. It's an approach that was mastered by Cadabra Records, a mid-1950s label that Denison says is one of Coye's biggest influences. Before audiobooks gained popularity, Cadabra released a handful of albums of unabridged literary readings by Vincent Price, Boris Karloff and Paul Robeson.

Cadabra's first release picks up where Cadabra left off. While better known as an illustrator for late '40s pulp mag *World Tales*, Coye (RIP 154) doubled as a writer himself. Among his endeavors, he penned a column for a local newspaper that serves as the basis for *Where Is Abby? & Other Tales*. Don't expect traditional ghost stories, however, as Coye's works are more macabre journalistic sketches, which incorporate elements of horror into accounts drawn from real life.

"As much as Lee Brown Coye had a love for the strange, he was also a history enthusiast," says Denison. "Lee rooted many of his stories around actual people or events, and had a great sense of dark humor." That personal appeal made Coye, who lived in central New York, an

ideal subject for Cadabra's first release. Denison says he was planning a collection of stories based on folklore legends from the area before meeting Coye's son, Robert. "I knew I had to make this project happen since the history of Lee Brown Coye is right in my backyard."

Eight of Coye's newspaper columns are featured on the album, many of which boast some connection to the creepier side of local history. The titular "Where Is Abby?" details a grim search for a missing old woman, while "The Lincoln Train" follows Coye's macabre encounter with the train that loured the president's body across the US in the wake of his death.

"The darkest story on the album is 'The Church,' which is based on an actual church here in Syracuse, New York," notes Denison. It tells of Coye's visit to the site where the church burned down spectacularly, and his imagined trip into the still-standing structure, where he witnesses an unusual funeral.

Denison decided he should also have Robert Coye read his dad's stories. "Since Robert has a musical and theatre background, as well as a great voice, I thought it would be much more personal to have Coye's bloodline speaking into the microphones than a voice actor," offers Denison. "We set up right in his living room, and if you listen closely, you might even hear a couple peeps from his cat."

Following the lead of boutique labels such as Death Wish and Woodwork, Cadabra's inaugural release is a deluxe 180 gram vinyl set with striking gatefold sleeves featuring art by Coye. Denison is currently planning additional Cadabra releases, including a series of H.P. Lovecraft albums to collect short stories such as "The Music of Brich Zena," "The Picture in the House"

and "The Lurking Fear." There's also more Coye on the slate, including a 7" box set featuring recordings of his complete "Worldones" — a series of illustrated dark folktales that were reader favourites in *World Tales* and *Whisper* magazines.

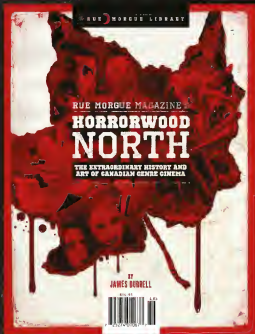
"The written word is much closer to me than music, so putting these records together has been really fun," reveals Denison. "A great reader will be able to paint a very clear and faithful picture of the story, and sometimes it's fun just to sit in the passenger seat." 🍷



LEE BROWN COYE  
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# PLAY DEATH

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## UNTIL DAWN

PS4

Scary Good Games

As I cling to the ledge, his head outstretched toward mine, I must decide: do I let go and be bloodied as the rocks wait my fall, or let her fall into the black pit and take the stranger's head, unleashing a fate I don't entirely trust? *Until Dawn* can tug at your heartstrings before it rips the still-beating muscle from your chest. It's all built down to player choice and sacrifice.

The interactive movie/adventure game is the macabre tale of a group of teenagers stuck out on a spending-a-weekend-in-the-countryside cabin, only to find that something really deep within the bowels of that lonely woods is... well, as the player, decide who lives and dies.

The familiar, cinematic plot structure shows developer Supermassive Games' understanding of what makes a slasher film work. However, this tactic may alienate the non-gamer work-literate, as the acting is cringe-worthy and the script laughably bad (these same two things, of course, will elicit a certain selection of horror fans' cheers).

*Until Dawn's* scares also lack the proper audio setup, effec-



tively during their work. The result is a game that feels like a campy '80s soap rather than a serious frightmare. In short, *Until Dawn* lacks the polish to be a great game, and the clunky controls are a hindrance rather than a conduit into the game world.

Despite its admittedly blinding second act, the title lingers as it moves into the third.

slipping away from its sinister influences and into more familiar western territory. The movie changes something that was blindly groggy into just another re-enters-and-guns horror genre.

Despite its faults, *Until Dawn* still succeeds. As teenagers begin slipping off, I pressed the controller tighter and began to wonder, "Will I even survive... and draw?"

SCOTT DILL



RECOMMENDATION: FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S 4 (PS4, SWITCH, PC)

REASON: DARK, GORE, SCARY, HORROR, FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S 4

## FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S 4

PS4, Android, iOS

Scary Good Games

I stand at the wall, the door's open just a crack. My finger hovers over the flashlight button. I hear breathing. I hear footsteps. Good, I hear my best friend. It's not a question of if something is coming. It's a question of when I know enough to look?

That's the beauty of *Five Nights at Freddy's 4*, the series in which the player is beset by malevolent animatronic figures. It has a deep understanding of the critical light. Every flick of the flashlight requires a tap, talk and a little lip as you bow the horror in the dark (this time the action takes place in a child's bedroom, rather than the original pizza joint or a haunted attraction). Even more terrifying is the fact that the series has shifted to second view, forcing you to wear headphones at high volume, thereby maximizing the sheer sense of dread of what's lurking just outside your bedroom.

But while the game's style and terror level have blossomed into adulthood, there's also a lack of understanding of game design here.

While most independent titles are beautiful in their simplicity, *Five Nights at Freddy's 4* is redundant.

Gameplay is essentially running between two doors, listening for breathing, and either holding the door shut or turning on the flashlight. When the suspense is gut-wrenching at first, the repetition quickly desensitizes you and boredom sets in. Is that too much to ask for in a paid-to-horror

adventure game? So while the techniques used to scare the player evolve and change, the gameplay itself rarely does. There may be an endless gamut of things to frighten you, but you're still having between the same two doors.

In the end, *Five Nights at Freddy's 4* is a lot like writing a thesis about zombies. Sure, it's scabrous, and there are worse things you could be doing with your time, but in the end of the day, it's still恐怖.

SCOTT DILL



RECOMMENDATION: SPOOKY'S HOUSE OF JUMP SCARES (PS4, SWITCH, PC)

REASON: DARK, GORE, SCARY, HORROR, SPOOKY'S HOUSE OF JUMP SCARES





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# CLASSIC CUT

## 'SALEM'S LOT

STEPHEN KING USA - 1975

**I**n 1979 many young, impressionable horror fans settled down in front of the television to watch — through trembling fingers — the highly anticipated CBS miniseries *'Salem's Lot*. Presented in two parts, the 184-minute vampire story—directed by Robo Houper (7th Annual Chilling Flesh) was based on Stephen King's 438-page book that some consider the Great American Horror Novel.

Released October 17, 1975, by Doubleday, it tells the tale of Ben Mears, a writer returning to Jerusalem's Lot, the small town in which he spent a portion of his childhood. His goal, aside from sorting out a particularly nasty divorce from his youth, is to write a novel based around the infamous Minster House, a decrepit, long-abandoned structure with a macabre history that has stood eerily over the small Maine settlement. His arrival coincides with that of two sinister men, Barlow and Straker, who have purchased the dwelling—described by Mears as a "prism to evil"—as well as the sudden disappearance of a local child. It soon becomes apparent that all is not as it would seem within the Lot, and Mears joins forces with several locals to stand against a gradual vampire onslaught.

The novel has endured, reimagining, among other things, a post-Vietnam/Watergate America, a material society estranged in an ethos of paranoia and distrust with regard to the once-assumed integrity of institutions of government and religious faith. Through this narrative, King dissects the unique oppression endemic to the insular culture of small-town America, particularly in the mid-1970s when hate computers, caligations, and social networking were inept to non-existent.

This deconstruction of America life woven into the mythology of

"One For the Road," respectively), and a three-book denouement in King's *Dark Towers* series featuring the tragic figure of Father Callahan, who came face to face with the master vampire Barlow in *'Salem's Lot*.

The legacy of *'Salem's Lot* is profound, though subtle. The relationship between the vampires Jerry Gendridge and his guardian Billy Cole in writer/director Tom Holland's 1985 film *Fright Night* is modelled after Barlow and Straker, and the house where the final battle of the movie takes place is a strong echo of the Minster House, with an '80s touch in an author's note regarding his 2004 novel *Midnight Mass*. F. Paul Wilson admits that he modeled his vampires on the "soulless, merciless, parasitic creatures" found in King's novel, and writes, "Stephen King gives us the real deal."


Walter Steve Miles has pointed out that Minster, the local vampire in his *30 Days of Night* comic, was "a tip of his hat to *'Salem's Lot*, both the book and TV movie. The TV movie scared the crap out of me when I was a kid, the window scene... so creepy."

And, most recently, the atmosphere of the novel and television series *The Strain* from Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan has been compared to *'Salem's Lot* crossed with *Q2*, with Hogan revealing in a 2009 *Rue Morgue* interview that King's 1975 novel was one of his main points of reference while writing *The Strain*.

Whether read as a commentary on the existential dangers threatening society or just as a classic horror yarn that entails a dreadful power within the 21st century, *'Salem's Lot* is arguably one of the most important novels of all time, costing a long and ominous silhouette over all other vampire narratives following its publication in 1975.

While set in the 1970s, the chill King weaves throughout his dark

# 'SALEM'S LOT



## Stephen King

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Ben Stoker's *Dracula* created a literary work that has inspired innumerable book printings, two broadcast television adaptations, a cinematic pseudo-sequel (*A Return to 'Salem's Lot*), a King-penned prequel and sequel short stories ("Jerusalem's Lot" and

tapestry are timeless and effective, as eldritch tale tale of ultimate evil basking in the pastoral mosaic of an imagined "real" America that has never actually existed.

JESS PRADOCK

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